

THE PROTESTANT DOCTRINE
OF REVELATION

The Protestant Doctrine of Revelation

*With special references to the writings of
John Oman, Jacques Maritain,
Karl Barth and others*

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TO
EILEEN WRIGHT
MY WIFE

TO WHOSE PATIENT READING AND RE-READING NOT ONLY
OF THE MANUSCRIPT BUT ALSO OF MANY DIFFICULT VOL-
UMES WITH ME IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS WORK, I OWE
MORE THAN WORDS CAN EXPRESS.

Foreword

I HAVE JUST READ, IN MANUSCRIPT, *The Protestant Doctrine of Revelation*. It is informative, readable and thought-provoking. The author reveals a wide acquaintance with standard works of Christian theology and has evidently engaged in thoroughgoing research in preparation of this volume.

The distinctive mark of our modern theology as opposed to that of the nineteenth century is the emphasis laid not upon man's divinity but rather upon his sin and his need of Divine redemption. Two great books have highlighted this development: Emil Brunner's *Man in Revolt* and Reinhold Niebuhr's *Nature and Destiny of Man*. While making no claim to the originality of thought displayed in the foregoing works, Dr. MacKinnon in *The Protestant Doctrine of Revelation* has rendered a notable service by re-emphasizing as the central element in Christian revelation not the disclosure of spiritual truths but the manifestation of a redemptive Personality.

Throughout the book he deals fairly and impartially with certain viewpoints which he rejects and sets forth his own distinctive and convincing thesis with clarity and objectivity.

I predict that *The Protestant Doctrine of Revelation* will serve as an incentive to ministers to preach more frequently, sustaining, bracing, "meaty" theological sermons rather than the all-too-common diet of ephemeral topical discourses.

JOHN SUTHERLAND BONNELL.

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Preface

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK IS twofold: (1) To defend the reality of revelation by defending the religion of revelation against a subjectivism that would ultimately deny the reality of God. (2) To furnish the Protestant answer to the question, "What is Divine Revelation?" As a background for the answer, the effort is made to distinguish clearly between the two great alternative views of revelation, namely, the doctrinaire and the practical, that is, the Roman and the Protestant.

Many people, particularly many Protestants, have only a vague understanding of the vital differences between Romanism and Protestantism. The view of this book is that the foundational distinction between the two is to be met with in their understanding of Divine revelation. It was at this point that Luther offered to the world something radically distinct. Even though Martin Luther fell away from his own position, the position was not lost. It was recovered and restored by later thinkers as will be shown. If we grasp what each means by revelation, we shall have the clue to the vital differences between the Roman and the Protestant positions. We must know both if we would be effective in propagating either.

Faith is man's response to God's revelation of Himself. The meaning of faith naturally depends upon the meaning we attach to revelation. If revelation is understood in one way, faith (religion) will possess certain characteristics. If revelation is interpreted in a radically different way, faith will also be radically different.

The contributions of Luther, Aquinas, Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Oman, Maritain, Barth and others to the study of revelation are reviewed. The works of the late John Oman, a modern exponent of the practical Protestant conception of revelation, and the works of Jacques Maritain, a champion of the Roman Catholic point of view, are examined in greater detail. A closing section is devoted to Barthianism. The view is expressed that while Barth has rendered fine service in calling people back from an over-emphasis upon the subjective aspects of religion, he is guilty of a dualism which is more serious for religion than the danger he sought to avoid.

The writer acknowledges with deep gratitude the help received from his teachers, the late Dr. William Morgan, Principal Micklem, Dr. J. M. Shaw, and Dr. E. F. Scott. He also cheerfully acknowledges valuable suggestions and criticisms from Dr. John Line, Professor John MacLeod, Dr. Trevor Davies, and the late Principal John MacNeil.

I am very deeply indebted to Dr. John Sutherland Bonnell of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York, who, in the midst of the busiest season of the Church Year took the time to read the manuscript and write the Foreword of this book.

It is hoped that this small work may help to deepen and widen interest in a subject so timely and so foundational as the meaning of Divine revelation.

JOHN Y. MACKINNON

*The Manse,
First-St. Andrew's,
London, Ontario,
June, 1945.*

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I

Introduction

REVELATION IS FUNDAMENTAL to religion. There could be no religion without revelation. The initiative is with God in all religion. God comes to assist man in his needs before man is aware that he has needs. When man responds with his faith or trust to God's approach, he is becoming religious.

Man meets with God in nature. The poetic mind regards nature as a very important medium of God's revelation. The poet finds "every common bush afire with God." Both the Old and New Testaments look upon nature as God's handiwork, setting forth His creative powers.

History is for most people a higher medium of Divine revelation. In history there are clearly discoverable purposes which involve man. In spite of many facts to the contrary, history reveals or manifests "a power not ourselves" working to improve man's lot or condition.

Conscience, when it appears, is a still higher medium of Divine revelation. Any vital movement in history has the conscience of some great person or persons for its fountain head. The organiza-

tion for peace in 1918 and again today in 1945 stemmed from the consciences of a few truly great persons.

But this general revelation of God in nature, history and conscience does not satisfy. Even conscience is not an infallible guide. It does not convince people that God is the Power behind the movement, and therefore the revelation coming through conscience does not win the complete trust of everybody. It would seem as if God had felt the inadequacy of this general revelation. At any rate, God chose and used the Hebrew people as a special means for making Himself known to the world, and He did so because of their unique capacity for religion. God showed Himself clearly in the Hebrew instinct towards righteousness, and in the ways in which they and particularly great personalities among them met trying experiences through which they had to pass. The great prophetic figures among them had characteristic experiences in which God came to them in convincing and arresting ways. Figures like Amos, Jeremiah, Isaiah and St. Paul readily come to our minds. No one can doubt that God was working among those people to accomplish great purposes. This race had a past of which it was proud, but the Hebrews as a race always felt that "the best is yet to be." Their hopes and their dreams could only be from God, whose "increasing purpose" was the salvation of mankind. Finally out of this race came Jesus, who is for us the final and the ever-expanding manifestation of God.

Before examining this climax in Jesus Christ, the question of the interpretation of Divine revelation must be faced. What do we receive in Divine revelation? Here comes a great parting of the ways. Traditional Roman Catholic Christian thought takes the position that the aim or purpose of Divine revelation is to furnish information concerning God which reason cannot obtain and which helps in connection with man's salvation. A different and, in our judgment, a truer interpretation of Divine revelation emerges in Protestantism, which affirms that revelation is not intellectual as the Roman church declares, but practical in

character. For Protestant thought, Divine revelation is not information concerning God, but God's giving of Himself for the practical purpose of persuading man into a Divine fellowship that will be transforming in its effects.

Martin Luther opened the way for this truer Protestant view by his emphasis, not upon information in doctrinal form, but upon fact, particularly the fact of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately he fell away from this position and once more identified doctrine and revelation. An extreme form of this traditional Protestantism is met with in Mozley's Bampton Lectures. For him revelation was truth which reason could not reach, and to it miracle in some form was attached as evidence or proof.

A severe reaction to this Protestantism came in English Deism and German Illuminism. In both cases the critics upheld the sufficiency of reason. Revelation was unnecessary and unverifiable. They took for granted that revelation was information, and that the verification of it could only be miraculous accompaniments externally attached. They never suspected that revelation might not be information but rather a manifestation in which miracle is integral and not external.

The result of this reaction was scepticism, which Kant and Hegel unsuccessfully sought to check. They made important contributions to religious knowledge, but it must be added that Kant made revelation impossible, and Hegel made it inferior to reason, which could better acquaint people with the Absolute.

Schleiermacher and Ritschl came as a reaction to the phenomenalism of Kant and the intellectualism of Hegel. Schleiermacher said that religion springs up in the soul as a result of contact with Divine reality which besets us behind and before. It is not through the medium of intellectual constructions that God approaches us, but through reality. God reveals Himself as the Infinite in the finite, the Eternal in the temporal, the Whole in the parts. Ritschl felt the inadequacy of the conception that regarded God merely as the Infinite, the Eternal, the Whole. For him love was the only conception of God that enables people

to understand the revelation that comes through Jesus Christ. Revelation for Ritschl means the facts in which we experience the power of God and know that God draws near to us as our Father and Saviour. In contact with Christ's moral might and holy love we feel the hand of God laid upon us, and know God as the one who forgives our sins and calls us into His fellowship and services. He may attach too exclusive significance to the revelation in Jesus Christ, for we must not isolate Him from other revelation facts in the world, but it is true, at the same time, that he makes a great contribution to the truer view of revelation.

A particular expression of this truer Protestant view is met with in John Oman, the late Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge. For him, too, the purpose of revelation is a practical one, and the essence of it is expressed in the word reconciliation. The aim of God's manifestation in nature, history, and supremely in Jesus Christ, is to persuade the world into a state of reconciliation with or trust in God, which means reconciliation with life.

Examined in the light of this truer view of revelation, the Life and Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ bring us face to face with God, whose love no ingratitude can quench, no pain can stop, and no power can destroy. The life of Jesus was not a "ridiculous" failure, as Barth might be inclined to say, but a triumphant manifestation of the holiness and mercy and redeeming love of God. His death was not an illustration of the extermination of human life, but a confident effort to do for man what man could not do for himself, namely, separate him from his sins and place him in the relation of at-one-ment with God. His resurrection was not the only manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, but, at the same time, it was the supreme declaration that love is the final power and might in the universe.

2

The Idea of Divine Revelation

THE DEEPEST THING IN MAN'S life, wherever found, is what is called the religious impulse or instinct, the attempt, namely, to come into fellowship with a Power or Powers outside and above himself, in which fellowship he may find succour and help for the practical needs of life. The needs are various. A. Ritschl¹, for example, finds the source of all religion in man's need of protection against the menace and pressure of nature. A worth attaches to persons which nature threatens to destroy. Nature is constantly saying to man: "It is vain for you to attempt to rise above me. All flesh is grass and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field." Thus there springs up in man's heart a need for God. We seek Him in order to maintain and guard this conviction that we are more and higher than nature. We can maintain our faith in the worth of persons only as we believe in a personal and righteous God who has supreme power over all. William Morgan holds that people turn to God, not only because of their sense of need, but also because of a thirst for companionship. We sense something

¹*Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 17.

more in the world than blind necessity; we discover something akin to ourselves with which we can hold fellowship and to which we can respond. "We turn to God, not only because we need His help, but also from a certain social instinct, the thirst for Him being in part a thirst for companionship. A world indifferent to all we hold dear, with no principle at the heart of it higher than blind necessity, would be no home for us, but a place of banishment. If we can rejoice in the world with a joy beyond that which comes from eating and drinking, it is because we are able to discover in it something akin to us, to which we can respond, the depths within answering to the depths without."²

The "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" have baffled peoples in all ages so that the cry for a saviour-God or gods is universal. "That at this time of day there should still be no general agreement regarding the nature of a phenomenon so immemorial, universal, and intimate as religion may well seem strange."³ S. Angus⁴ points out that when the gods of theology appeared to be asleep people have lauded their earthly rulers as gods. J. E. Carpenter⁵, in a chapter on "The Panorama of Religions," tells how the Stoics worked out the conception of a fellowship between man and God which explained the universality of religion, and then he adds: "So we possess a certain kinship with the heavenly powers; and while among all the kinds of animals *Man* alone retains any idea of Deity, among men themselves there is no nation so savage as not to admit the necessity of believing in a God, however ignorant they may be what sort of God they ought to believe in." The science of comparative religion thus shows that man is everywhere religious. Man's nature implies religion. It used to be held that there were people who lacked the religious impulse, but more recent investigations contradict this view. It is impossible to explain man as a product

²Morgan, W.: *The Nature and Right of Religion*, pp. 25-26.

³Morgan, W.: *The Nature and Right of Religion*, p. 1.

⁴*The Mystery Religions and Christianity*, p. 227.

⁵*Comparative Religion*, pp. 48-49.

of nature. Man can only be interpreted ideally, that is, as a person in, and yet above the process of nature. "Idealism alone can so interpret man so as not to lower the value of his spiritual interests and pursuits."⁶

But to think of religion as thus the search of man for God and for fellowship with God does not bring us to the deepest truth about religion. Back of man's search for God lies God's search for man. The tendency of present-day religious thinking with its emphasis on, almost obsession by, the psychology of religion, is to represent religion as an activity of the human spirit directed towards the Divine. God tends, on this way of thinking, to become but the projection of man's inner needs. For certain branches of the New Psychology, religion is a mere creature of the imagination working in the service of our subjective desires. Scholars of the Epicurean school used to affirm that mankind's earliest gods were born of fear: "Primus in orbe deos fecit timor . . ."⁷

L. Feuerbach and S. Freud are more modern representatives of this mode of thought. The former held that the gods of religion and all Divine objects of which religion speaks are nothing but wish-beings (*personifizierte Wunsche*). Like Augustus Comte, he held that he could know nothing beyond his own consciousness. "Religion is the dream of the human mind. But even in dreams we do not find ourselves in emptiness or in heaven, but on earth, in the realm of reality and necessity. Hence I do nothing more to religion than to open its eyes."⁸ When religion's eyes have been opened, it will learn that the realities to which objective existence beyond oneself was ascribed, are nothing more than the needs and desires which man has harboured in his own heart. God is for Feuerbach only another name for what man would wish himself to be. This view was revived recently by the psychoanalysts Freud and Jung. They, too, regard the gods

⁶Garvie, A. E.: *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, Extra Vol., p. 322.

⁷Statius: *Thebaidos*, iii, p. 360 f.

⁸Feuerbach: *Das Wesen des Christentums*, p. xi.

of religion as wish-beings. The claim is that God is only the projection into the unknown Beyond of our own purely subjective desires, and Freud goes so far as to say: "It is difficult to express it in other terms, the analogy of paranoia must here come to our aid. We venture to explain in this way the myths of paradise and the fall of man, of God, of good and evil, of immortality and the like."⁹

There is a deep element of truth in this position. The projection of a construction of one's spiritual experience upon the screen of the Beyond is the greatest way to know what God Himself is like. This projecting can be accomplished only because God has made man in His own image and has written His laws indelibly upon the walls of his heart. Where we differ from these projectionists is in the matter of the motive attached to the projection. They claim that the motive for doing it is merely man's own wish or desire to believe in God. This opinion is scarcely worth refuting. "It is surely contrary to anything we know in human nature that man thus tends to objectify his own 'castles in the air' and comes to believe with a firm and steady conviction that they represent facts of the most solid kind. It is surely absurd to suggest that the gap between the paranoic's displacement and that of superstition . . . is so imperceptibly narrow as this theory implies; for that would seem to mean nothing less than that all the world except the few isolated souls who have definitely turned their backs on religious ways of thought, are in a state of mind not properly distinguishable from insipient madness."¹⁰ Discussing this same quotation from Freud, W. B. Selbie said that while psychoanalysis can do much to free the mind from the repressive influence of religious doubt and struggle and that while wise use of suggestion can often do much to restore sanity, yet he affirms very strongly that the position taken by Freud is not justified even by Psychology.¹¹ Dr. Selbie writes equally

⁹Freud: *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, p. 310.

¹⁰Baillie, John: *The Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 162-165.

¹¹Selbie, W. B.: *The Psychology of Religion*, p. 295.

emphatically against similar statements made by Jung and Tansley, the former making God "a mere psychological function of an irrational nature" and the latter stating the same position a little less crudely when he derives religion from the idealizing tendency of the human mind. The reasoning of these Psychologists, says Selbie, ties us down to a purely subjective view of religion, religion being nothing more than the outcome of human activity. For them God is nothing but a fantasy which may have some value for man's moral and spiritual development. Dr. Selbie concludes his criticism of this type of Psychology with the following words: "The great defect of the New Psychology, in its most extreme forms, is that it derives its material almost exclusively from morbid and pathological cases. . . . It is impossible to regard the religious extravagances of neurotics as in any sense really representative, and theories of religion derived from a study of such experiences are not likely to be very sound."¹²

To repeat, the primary thing about religion is not man's search for God but God's search for man. The initiative lies with God. The primary and ultimate thing about religion is not the activity of the human spirit directed towards the Divine, but the activity of the Divine directed towards the human. So then, religion, on our side, is a response to a prior approach from God's side. Back of religion lies Divine revelation.¹³

God's initiative in connection with man's needs is a positive manifestation of God and the explanation of all genuine religion. This is illustrated very clearly in the prophets of Israel and the Apostle to the Gentiles. The initiative was with God. God approached them, laid His hands upon them, and when they responded with their trust, they became great and powerful religious personalities. For Christians, Jesus is the supreme illustration of God's initiative in meeting the various needs of life. Faith is man's personal response to God's revelation of Himself. Religion is not a childish pathetic hallucination in which man

¹²*The Psychology of Religion*, pp. 296-297.

¹³Morgan, W.: *The Nature and Right of Religion*, p. 84.

creates his own God, but rather a response to a prior approach from God's side. "Christian faith does nothing so easy and cheap, nothing so specious as to turn these human cravings into an explanation of religion itself."¹⁴ The first step was taken from God's side. He saw man's need for He had made man and knew man better than man knew himself. In a later work¹⁵ Dr. Mackintosh is even more emphatic in support of the view that faith on our part is a response to a prior approach on God's part: "Faith is the response to a reality which evokes, invites and rewards acquaintance." Many other writers like A. B. Davidson¹⁶ and Theodore Haering¹⁷ confirm the view that back of religion is Divine revelation, and that the revelation is what produces or creates human faith.

It is clear, therefore, that in religion the initiative lies with God. He first moves toward man, that man might move towards Him to have his needs met. That the initiative is with God is a truth which is not confined to religion alone. It would be possible to show that in Science and Art, as well as in Religion, the initiative is with God. Back of man's search to discover truth or order in nature lies Divine truth and order waiting to be discovered. The discoveries of science are discoveries and not creations. The Quantum Theory and the Theory of Relativity bring at least this much to light for all of us, namely, that the Scientist in his investigations, unlike the Newtonian Scientist, becomes aware of a mind, a purpose, a meaning in the whole field of nature. He is not merely in a world of matter and impact, but in a world with mind, a mind that was there ahead of him, and he examines its activity with a reverent sense of companionship.¹⁸ C. Lloyd Morgan, who might be styled a philosopher-biologist, joins the Physicists in giving primacy to the presence and activity of God, and he has no hesitation in acknowledging God as the Nisus or

¹⁴Mackintosh, H. R.: *The Divine Initiative*, p. 33.

¹⁵*The Christian Apprehension of God*, pp. 64-65. 3rd edition.

¹⁶*Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2, p. 197.

¹⁷*The Christian Faith*, Vol. I, p. 201.

¹⁸Eddington, A. S.: *The Nature of the Physical World*, p. 331.

endeavour through whose activity emergents emerge, and the whole course of emergent evolution is, for him, directed by God.¹⁹ Dr. J. S. Haldane, a physiologist, concludes²⁰ that this universe is a spiritual universe and the manifestation of God within and all around us. He discourages the cry for the Supernatural but it is only because he finds "earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God." We examine Art and find similar testimonies. The Sculptor, for example, acknowledges that the figure was in the marble before he lifted his hand to expose it. His constant fear is that the figure might elude his grasp and that what he will expose to the world will not be as wonderful as it might have been. It is told that Michael Angelo used to hear a voice out of the marble directing him in his work.

But in religion the Divine initiative is specially clear. The belief in Divine revelation is not a belief peculiar to Judaism and Christianity, it is a belief common less or more to all religions. In particular in the great historical religions, the belief in Divine revelation meets us. A striking fact is that practically all the sacred books of the world profess to be based on Divine revelation. The oldest of the "Bibles of Humanity" took shape in India in what is known as the Vedic hymns. Similar views concerning the origin of sacred books could be quoted from Persians, Hebrews, Mohammedans, Chinese and Japanese. "Of every religion, the idea of revelation is an integral part."²¹ But it is specially true of the Christian religion with its preparation in Judaism, that man's approach to God is a response to God's prior approach to man. "We can now understand why the world's great men of faith should always have represented their acquisition of religious insight as having its deepest origin, not in any activity of their own spirits, but rather in the activity of that greater spirit who was seeking to make Himself known."²²

¹⁹*Emergent Evolution*, p. 36.

²⁰*The Sciences and Philosophy*, p. 340.

²¹Fairbairn, A. M.: *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 484.

²²Baillie, John: *The Interpretation of Religion*, p. 463.

3

Stages in Divine Revelation

RELIGION ON OUR SIDE BEING thus grounded in revelation on God's side, different stages in Divine revelation, lower and higher have to be distinguished. Two great stages in particular have to be distinguished. First, there is the more general revelation of God which is common to all men, a revelation permanent and universal. Second, there is a more special or specific revelation made in the history of different people, more particularly in the history of one people, the people of Israel, leading up to God's supreme revelation or self-disclosure to men in Jesus Christ.

A

To refer to the more general revelation first: This was a revelation or manifestation of God to men made in three great media: nature, history and man's moral consciousness or conscience. (a) First, there is the revelation of God to man through His manifestation of Himself in nature and the world without. To this revelation the Psalmist refers when he writes: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto

night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun." The voice¹ of God in nature uses no language that can be heard by the hearing of the ears, but it is understood by the mind of man. In the power, intelligence, purpose and rational order of the world, men, in all ages have seen the intelligence or reason of the Power which is the Creator of the Universe.

This was the essence of the old theistic arguments for the existence of God, in particular the Design argument, as old as Socrates, but associated in modern times particularly with the name of Paley in the eighteenth century. In the marvellous natural constitution of the eye, for example, Paley saw a super-human Eye-maker. The modern theory of evolution has not destroyed this mode of thought, but has given it a more adequate expression. In its older form the Design argument was apt to lay stress upon isolated instances of adaptation in the midst of the ordinary natural sequence of nature, the revelation of a Divine Intelligence and Purpose being found in the exceptional rather than in the whole process of nature's working. The doctrine of evolution regards the whole process of nature as a wonderful adjustment, an evolving progressive whole, every stage of which is a means to ends beyond itself, the whole finding its end in the emergence of a rational self-conscious moral and spiritual personality, a being made in the image of God for His fellowship and service.

This, then, is the primary stage in Divine revelation—the manifestation of God in nature. Barthian theologians attach no revelation-value to nature. In the opinion of the writer, to deny nature as a medium of God's revelation is to step down into pagan and polytheistic modes of thought. For Karl Barth, revelation confronts us in two moments of what he calls "Revela-

¹*Psalm 19: 1-4.*

tion-history," namely in the Incarnation and in the Resurrection, but chiefly in the Resurrection in which one sees the breaking in of God into history, of eternity into time, the point in which, as Barth says, we see the other world, the world of the supernatural, piercing with its vertical line the horizontal line of history. Barth emphasizes this sovereign transcendence of God so vigorously as to introduce a sheer dualism between the natural and supernatural—resembling Hellenistic dualism, between nature and history on the one hand and God's revelation in Christ on the other. He had no place for "natural theology," to which reference has been made, which meets with God in nature. To deny God in this way, or to lift God out of the world of nature, is to replace Him there by a host of lesser deities which will guide and control the various aspects of life in nature. Barth's dread of immanence degenerating into pantheism lands him in an atheistic view of nature, a worse philosophical state than that which he sought to avoid.

(b) Second, there is the revelation of God in history. He is present in history as supreme Intelligence and the moral Power guiding all for righteous ends, in Matthew Arnold's words, "a power not ourselves which makes for righteousness." There are facts in the world which seem to challenge this conviction, particularly the facts of sin and suffering. There are other facts in the world, however, which justify man in retaining this conviction. The widespread interest in social justice today and in a new world of peace reveal a spirit in the world which we believe will prove to be more powerful than the sin and suffering around us. In a world in which God lives, victory should be with the good and we are not without signs today that this is how things work out in history. Recall the Prophet's account of what befell Assyria and Babylon and others when God's hand was laid upon them in punishment for their sins. Parallels to this will be recorded in the history of our own times. In the history of the French Revolution, Carlyle sets himself to illustrate the operations of this moral power in the world. The lesson he

continually enforces is that unrighteousness cannot endure for ever, that ultimately it is struck by the lightning bolt of Divine judgment and brought to nought.² There is clear recognition of the same Power in the second Presidential address of Abraham Lincoln in its reference to the American Civil War: “. . . Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsmen’s two-hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, ‘The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.’”

For Carlyle and Lincoln, God is revealed in the retributive workings of history. God is seen, not only in the principle of retribution, but still more in a redemption that is also at work in history. The Hebrew prophets saw such redemptive workings in the deliverance of their nation from the Egyptian bondage, in its settlement in the “land of promise,” and in the new opportunities which opened up for the nation.³ The Old Testament writers believed, that is, that Israel was preserved from threatening disasters because God had a purpose for her to accomplish in other nations. It is not necessary to argue here that Israel had such a purpose and fulfilled it, and that the loss would have been irreparable had she perished before that purpose had been accomplished. Our conclusion is that, in wide perspective, history manifests a moral Power at the heart of things, proving that in the long run men and nations rise and fall according as they are or are not found in the way of righteousness.

(c) Third, there is the revelation of God in the moral consciousness of man with its intimations of a higher will. Our consciousness of moral values, our sense of right and wrong are facts in which God speaks to us. All forward movements have

²Carlyle, Thos.: *French Revolution*, Book 2, Chap. 2, p. 37.

³*Jeremiah* 31.

commanding personalities at their centre. The consciences of those central figures are the fountain-heads of progress, and are, as Jesus believed, revelations of God. Immanuel Kant spoke of the categorical imperative which is the voice of conscience; Jesus spoke of the "eye" which, when it is single or pure, guides people as only God can. God has made remarkable use of the consciences of individuals to accomplish His purposes or to set them in motion in the world. We have only to think of Hebraism coming from Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and their successors, of Zoroastrianism coming through Zoroaster, Buddhism through Gautama, Islam through Mohammed and Christianity through Jesus, to believe that man's conscience is indeed an important medium of Divine revelation.

The Empiricist attempts to explain the sense of "oughtness," of which Kant and others spoke, in an empirical way, as the result of the experience of the past as to the expediency or non-expediency of certain ways of acting. We do not consider this a serious obstacle in the way. C. D. Broad⁴ says: "We are all extremely liable to confuse a history of the becoming of a thing with an analysis of the thing as it has become. . . . Thus, suppose that we could show that action from a sense of duty developed out of action from fear of public opinion, that this developed out of action from fear of the ghosts of dead ancestors, and that this developed out of action from fear of living chiefs. All that we should really have done would be to give a history of the process of becoming which ended in action from a sense of duty. But we should be very liable to think that we had analyzed the sense of duty as it now exists, and proved that it is just a disguised form of fear of punishment by tribal chiefs. . . . You have no right to say that the end is just the beginning in disguise if, on inspecting the end as carefully and fairly as you can, you do not detect the characteristics which were present in the beginning."

⁴*The Mind and Its Place in Nature*, pp. 12-13.

Summing up this section, we re-affirm the revelation-value of man's moral consciousness. There will always be in the world minds that are imbued with a sense of *oughtness*. At their best, these are the prophetic minds who proclaim the dictates of conscience as the very word of God. "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes."⁵

B

So much for God's more general revelation of Himself and the different elements in it. But the facts of nature and history and conscience do not exhaust God's revelation of Himself to man. God's purpose in His revelation could not be fully realized in nature, history and conscience; hence arose the need for a specific revelation of God for the sake of the fulfilment of the ends of this more general revelation, and this was made in the history of Israel culminating in Jesus Christ.⁶ There are two main differences between this specific revelation and the more general revelation already examined.

First, this special revelation was confined, to begin with, to one people, the people of Israel, in order that through this people it might reach all nations. This has been God's method always in the progress of the race. He chooses or "elects" different nations for different purposes and Israel was "elect" in particular for religious purposes. The same could be said of Greece in connection with art and literature. Greece has made contributions of permanent value in these fields, and what has to be said about them is that God must have intended them to come through that nation for the service and benefit of all people. In spite of Germany's decline in culture and education in our day, one is inclined to think that Germany must have been "elect" to give the world leadership and inspiration in Music. We cannot think that Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Mendelssohn and others belonged

⁵*Isaiah* 1: 16.

⁶See H. R. Mackintosh: *The Christian Apprehension of God*, Edition 3, pp. 69-70; also *Romans*, Chaps. 1 and 2.

to that nation by mere coincidence. Shakespeare, Wesley, Shaftesbury, Lincoln and Roosevelt make us confident that the British and the Americans were also "elect" to accomplish great purposes for mankind. God does not elect people that they might become selfish and superior people. As soon as people misinterpret their genius in that fashion, they fail and fall as Israel often did when she misinterpreted her Divine mission. God chooses individuals and nations and confers surpassing genius upon them that, through their ministry, life might be made happier, fuller and nobler for the thronging multitudes. "As limitation of effort and concentration of energy are the necessary conditions of the greatest efficiency and fullest service, it would seem that in no one people could all the functions of a complete humanity be developed: to each must be assigned the development of one function, the results of this development in each being in course of time made the property of all."⁷

Second, this special revelation was a revelation, not only limited in space, but conditioned by time, not static but gradual, progressive, accommodated to the developing religious capacities of Israel, and in particular of its leading religious personalities. Of this principle of Divine accommodation Dr. A. Garvie writes⁸: "That a revelation may be effective for the ends for which it may be intended, it must be adapted to the stage of growth of the persons to whom it is given. Accordingly the idea of evolution, the application of which has been so fruitful in other branches of knowledge, not only may but must be utilized to the interpretation of this revelation. Viewed from this standpoint it shows a steady if slow progress, not without relapses followed by recoveries, yet with the dominant tendency to truer thought, purer worship and better life. . . ." James Orr⁹ expresses similar thoughts in the following words: "In general, then, we perceive that revelation, without parting with anything of its reality or authority, is

⁷Garvie, A.: Article on Revelation, *Hastings D.B.*, Extra Vol., p. 324.

⁸*Hastings D.B.*, Extra Vol., p. 324.

⁹*The Problem of the Old Testament*, pp. 476-477.

in the truest sense, an organic process—a growing from less to more, with adaptation at every point to the stage of development of its recipients—a light shining often in a dark place, but still shining more and more unto the perfect day. Its higher stages criticize, if we may so speak, its lower; shed off temporary elements; disengage principles from the imperfect forms in which they are embodied, and give them more perfect expression; yet unfailingly conserve, and take up into the new form, every element of permanent value in the old.” Thus there were stages in the revelation of the Divine character and purpose until “in the fullness of time,” after a slow, gradual education the Divine character and purpose became fully revealed in Jesus Christ.

The record and interpretation of the main stages in this special revelation of God in the history of Israel culminating in Jesus Christ we have before us in the Bible. And the question to which we have now to address ourselves more particularly is: What was the chief end or purpose of this specific developing revelation coming to its consummation in Jesus Christ, the record and interpretation of which is thus before us in Scripture?

4

Roman Catholic View of Revelation

WHEN WE ASK THE QUESTION, what is the chief end or purpose of this special revelation, we are faced with two great alternative views. First, there is the view that the purpose of revelation is a supernatural communication of truth—truth about God, Man and the Universe, which man could not so easily or early reach by the exercise of his own reasoning powers. Second, there are those who hold that the aim of revelation is not the intellectual one suggested, but the practical one of establishing fellowship with God that will transform man's life.

The first is the Roman Catholic view and is sometimes spoken of as the intellectual or doctrinaire conception of revelation. It is also the traditional Protestant view, though not native to nor true to the genius of Protestantism, as we shall see. This conception of revelation prevailed in the early Church under Christian apologists who were in the first place philosophers and who came to the study of the Christian religion as philosophers. Their concern was to gather information and to be intellectually correct and thus it was that revelation was regarded by them as

the communication of information in correct form from God and concerning God.

This developed into the mediæval scholastic position represented by Thomas Aquinas. By nature and education he was the spirit of Scholasticism incarnate. For the Roman Church it is reason that provides man with the basal religious truths, such as, that there is a God and that He rules the world in righteousness. The distance that reason can carry a man is limited. The higher Christian truths, which constitute the crown of religion, reason is helpless to give. Reason can tell one that there is a God, but not that He is triune. These higher truths come, for the Roman Catholic, by means of revelation, which is a system of supernatural truths which are accepted by faith. Reason accepts the truths of revelation with an authoritative guarantee.

Early Scholasticism was dominated by the belief that though the higher truths of revelation were not discoverable by reason, yet they were capable of rational demonstration and of being built up with other knowledge into a rational system. This confidence disappeared in later Scholasticism and revealed truth was grounded wholly in authority. The authority that guaranteed it was the authority of the Church. The Roman Catholic view of revelation is given us in the *Roman Catholic Encyclopædia*, in which revelation is defined as "the communication of some truth by God to a rational creature through means which are beyond the ordinary course of nature."¹ The essence of revelation is that it is the direct speech of God to man. It may come to man through a prophet, but it must first be a direct message.

By a Decree issued July 3rd, 1907, under the title *Lamentabili*, it was affirmed that the dogmas recognized by the Church as revelation must be "*veritates e coelo delapsae*" and not truths discovered by the efforts of the human mind. The truths, which are regarded as the crown of religion, have to be accepted by faith, which Thomas Aquinas defines as an act of the intellect

¹Vol. 13, pp. 1-5.

which is moved to assent through an act of will. The Roman Church has been most insistent on putting on the *Index* all erroneous views concerning the autonomy of reason. It is the limitation of human reason that makes revelation necessary.

The Roman Church regards the defence of the possibility of revelation as one of the most important aspects of Christian apologetics. Rationalists condemn the miraculous as impossible and the miraculous for the Roman Church is the greatest proof of revelation. Rationalists uphold the autonomy of reason and this would be fatal to revelation from the Catholic standpoint. She has contended with those who regard knowledge as subjective in character. She maintains that revelation is strictly from God to man. Up to a certain limit man is independent, but at that point he becomes entirely dependent upon Divine revelation in connection with which his duty is intellectual submission, as Thomas Aquinas affirms. The Church sees no physical difficulties in the way of revelation. God has endowed man with a faculty for communicating his thoughts to his fellows. God cannot be without the power or faculty for communicating His thoughts to man.

It is not inconsistent with God's wisdom that He should give special aid to man in the attainment of blessedness. Man is endowed to achieve this end, but, out of His generosity, God communicates special information to make it easier for man to know the natural laws by which he becomes blessed. The need for this special assistance is clearer, it is claimed, when one thinks of original sin for which the individual is in no way responsible, but which, nevertheless, hinders spiritual progress. Original sin does not destroy the rational or intellectual faculties, but it weakens man's grasp of truth, and it clouds his understanding of the moral law with doubts and questionings. External assistance is necessary for the attainment of absolute truth in all matters religious. This is the necessary ground for belief in revelation and this is the meaning that is attached to it by the Roman Catholic Church.

However, it is only a moral necessity and not an absolute necessity that is claimed for Divine revelation by the Roman Church. It is because of God's generous concern for man's blessedness that the truths of revelation are communicated. Man possesses the faculties for the right ordering of his life, but it is very rarely that the truths of the moral law are so plain and so easily discoverable to man that his knowledge of them is alike free from uncertainty and secure from serious error. The bulk of mankind falls below the knowledge of the moral law and only the few have the time, inclination and opportunity to separate truth from error. If it were not for the assistance afforded by revelation most people would give up the task as a hopeless one. Hence the moral necessity for revelation according to the Roman Church.

The possibility and necessity of revelation are regarded by the Roman Church as almost sufficient evidence of the reality and truth of revelation. She believes, however, that there are criteria of Divine revelation which anyone can recognize. These are internal and external in character. Miracles are the most important of the external criteria which attach themselves to Divine revelation as evidence of its truth. Internal criteria are of two kinds. One is the immunity of the revealed doctrine against speculative or moral error. This also shows itself in guarding from fraud those who deliver the revelation to the world. The others are positive in character and manifest themselves, for example, in the benefits resulting from the acceptance of the revealed doctrines and in the internal conviction of the soul concerning the truth of the doctrine. More confidence, however, is put in the external than in the internal criteria. Without objective proof such as miracles afford, internal criteria which are important for those who possess them convey but a probability that revelation is true. The Church, therefore, condemns the errors of those who regard inward experience as the only criterion. "In order that the obedience of our faith might be agreeable to reason, God has willed that to the internal aids of the

Holy Spirit, there should be joined external proofs of His revelation, namely, *facta divina*, especially miracles and prophecy, which, inasmuch as they manifestly display the omnipotence and omniscience of God, are most certain signs of a Divine revelation and are suited to the understanding of all.”² Another criterion that is regarded as Divine is the Church herself and, as proof of this purpose that she serves, emphasis is laid upon her propagation, her sanctity, her unity, and her stability.

The Roman Church distinguishes between what she terms “deposit of faith” and “private revelation.” She believes that God has spoken to people in all ages and still speaks to chosen souls. Yet this private revelation is carefully distinguished from the main revelation committed to her charge and which she offers to her members for acceptance. This “deposit,” which she terms “the faith once delivered to the saints,” was given in its entirety to the Lord and His Apostles and has not been added to since the last of the Apostles. Nothing can be added to this “deposit” which is the Christian Revelation. The only point of debate, then, in relation to any doctrine is whether or not it is found in Scripture or in Apostolic tradition. The Pope can be assisted in his task of defining the faith, but he has no power to add to the “given revelation.” It has been declared that the meaning of the Church’s dogma is immutable, though Cardinal Newman said that true ideas possess assimilative energy which permits them to reach a more complete expression without undergoing any substantive change.

We may sum up the foregoing by saying that for the Roman Church revelation is the communication of truth, rather than the manifestation of a Divine life and its chief characteristic is that it presents people with mysteries which are to be accepted on the guarantee of the church. Revelation is a Divine source of knowledge of which Scripture and church traditions are the channels. The conception which grew up in the Roman Church

²*De Fide Cath.*, Chap. 3.

is that revelation is the supplement of reason. Reason is able to reach certain truths which form the basis of what may be called natural religion. These truths, by themselves, are insufficient for salvation and the necessary supplement, God has given, it is believed, in creeds or formulated truths which are supernaturally communicated. These are derived in the last resort from Scripture and their truth is guaranteed by the church. Doctrines supernaturally given and with a supernatural guarantee—this is the Roman Catholic conception of Divine revelation.

5

A Modern Interpreter of Thomas Aquinas: Jacques Maritain

JACQUES MARITAIN IS REGARDED by many as the leading modern interpreter of Thomas Aquinas. Rationalistic humanism centred in the Sorbonne was the ruling philosophy of Paris and of France when Maritain was born there in 1882. Renan with his liberalism in religion as well as political and social thought was receiving the widest attention. Renan contended that historical criticism had destroyed Christianity as a system of supernatural beliefs and his views proved more hurtful than those of Voltaire. Maritain was too young to come under the direct influence of Renan, but it reached him through a close friend, a grandson of Renan.

When Maritain grew to young manhood he was greatly distressed by the scepticism which emanated from the Sorbonne. His mother, who had had him baptized in the Protestant faith to which she had turned only a short time before, paid very little attention to his religious training. He came to think that truth was unattainable and that man had no capacity for truth and knowledge of reality. This landed Maritain and his wife in

despair and at one time they contemplated suicide as a way out. Bergson, the philosopher, rescued them from this despair by convincing them that pure rationalism was not the only road to reality and that by intuition reality could be reached and grasped. About this same time he became acquainted with a religious mystic who influenced him more than any other. Through this mystic, Maritain came to know others who had similar faith in goodness and truth and in God as the source of all that is good. In 1906 Maritain and his wife were received into the Roman Church. He was naturally a philosopher who immediately looked around for a system of thought into which to fit his new religious life. When he became acquainted with Thomas Aquinas he became a devoted follower at once because of the Thomist confidence in reason's ability to achieve knowledge of reality. He not only became a devoted follower but also one of the greatest modern interpreters of Thomist thought.

Before examining his interpretation of Thomism as it is found in his greatest work, *Degrees of Knowledge*, first published in 1937, it might be stated that Maritain has devoted much of his time to the religious interpretation of social problems. It is this fact that has won for him a large number of readers. It is interesting to find him lacking the absolute confidence in reason which characterizes Roman Catholic thinking. Maritain's great confidence in Mysticism, which will be examined later, seems to draw a sharp line between him and Aquinas whom he professes to follow with such complete devotion. Nothing could be further from the mind of Aquinas than adherence to Mysticism as a way to knowledge of God. Aquinas recognized the fact of such an approach but felt that it was rarely met with in this world and was mainly reserved for the future life. Aquinas was too much of a Realist and too much of an Aristotilian to be a Mystic. To say the least, it is difficult and baffling to define the position of a philosopher like Maritain who is at times so adversely critical of St. Augustine, whose thinking was marked by mystical features, and so devoted to Aquinas, the great realist and Aristotilian who

demanded "that all construction and mechanism should be rigorously subordinated to the imminent activity and vital movement of intellection."¹ But more confusing still is the fact of his detailed account of the thinking of St. John of the Cross which convinces anyone that for him mystical knowledge of God is the only true and valid knowledge. To repeat, it is strange and baffling to find him at one and the same time opposed in some measure to Augustine, a Mystic; in agreement with Thomas Aquinas, a realist with complete confidence in reason and sense experience; and finally an admirer and advocate of the Mystic way represented by the thinking of St. John of the Cross. Maritain affirms that Thomism is not a system which unfolds or progresses from piece to piece. Whether this be true of Aquinas or not, it certainly seems to be true of Maritain's own thinking, judged by the varied and contradictory positions pointed out above.

But let us turn to *Degrees of Knowledge*, which, according to Principal Micklem of Mansfield, contains Maritain's interpretation of Aquinas. As the title of the book suggests, there are, for him, steps or degrees of knowledge. The first degree of knowledge is that attainable by the physical sciences and Mathematics which Maritain terms "dianoetic," that is, knowledge dependent upon the accidents of substances about which our senses tell us. He calls this knowledge "dianoetic" when he thinks of how such knowledge comes to us, namely, through the senses, and he calls it "perinoetic" when he thinks of the periferal or superficial character of this knowledge.

The second degree of knowledge he calls "Wisdom." This is Metaphysics which works first with the data furnished by the senses. Metaphysical use of reason carries one into the realm of the supernatural, and by a mode of knowledge which he calls "analogic" or "annoetic" one knows that God is or exists. This certainty comes through a reflection cast by God in the things

¹*Degrees of Knowledge*, p. xiv.

He has made. Somewhat as the clouds are reflected in a lake and one can see the reflection by looking down not up, so, he argues, there is a mirror-like shadow of God in the realities around us. The objects of metaphysical knowledge are not known to us in their essence, yet they are known to us intrinsically and rightly designated, but at a distance, not "in themselves." "Nevertheless they (objects of metaphysical knowledge) are known intrinsically and rightly designated, constituted as objects of intellection but at a distance and not 'in themselves': the ray of intellectual light which reaches them has been refracted or reflected and they always remain above the knowledge which we have of them, superior to our grasp which reaches up to them, separated from our mind in the very act which unites it with them."²

This knowledge, which is very limited and in no way furnishing a description of God and only making us sure that God exists, is knowledge which is in the individual's mind or intelligence. It is reached by and resides in the individual's mind. So far as reason goes, the Metaphysicians are the only ones who know that God is a reality. It is the grandeur of Metaphysics that it should be so eager to know God, but it is the misery of Metaphysics that it falls short of real knowledge of God and has to be satisfied with the certainty that He exists. "Metaphysical wisdom possesses the most pure degree of abstraction because it is at the farthest remove from the senses; it opens out onto the immaterial on a world of realities and which can only exist in separation from matter. But our means of ascension mark also our limits. . . . Metaphysics wishes purely to contemplate, to overpass reason and enter into pure intellection, aspires to the unity of a simple gaze. It approaches it like an asymptote and cannot achieve. . . . The principle of everything that is, this is what it (Metaphysics) would know. And how can it fail to desire that this knowledge should be perfect and complete, the absolute

²*Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 268-269.

and fulfilling knowledge whereby it may know Him in His essence, in that which makes the substances of His actual life? This, then, is the misery of metaphysics and also its greatness. It rouses the desire for the supreme union, spiritual possession constituted in the very order of reality, and not only in ideas. And it cannot satisfy it.”³

Beyond Metaphysics comes for Maritain the level or degree of knowledge which he calls Cataphatic Theology, that is, knowledge of God through reason’s working with the “deposit of revelation” which God gave of Himself. “Above the wisdom of the natural order, . . . stands the science of revealed mysteries—theology properly so called: which rationally develops in the discursive manner which is of our nature, the truths virtually comprised in the deposit of revelation. Proceeding according to the method and sequence of reason but rooted in faith, from which it receives its principles, the rightful light of theology, drawn from the science of God, is not that of reason alone, but of reason illuminated by faith. By this very reason its certitude in itself is higher than that of Metaphysics.”⁴

By this degree or type of knowledge one knows God as God is known to Himself. One knows more than the existence, one knows Him in a way which might be termed descriptive, and yet even here man does not lay hold of God as an object as He is known in Himself. “In effect it is God Himself, as He is known in Himself, the divine transintelligible as He is in Himself and object to Himself—to Himself and to the blessed—in as much as He gives Himself to our grasp who is attained by faith: but without meanwhile our being able to lay hold of Him, without His becoming in Himself an object for us, not seen as the blessed see. He is only the object of our understanding in the ananoetic mode or as in a mirror of which the Metaphysical knowledge of God has already furnished an example. . . .”⁵

³*Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 6-7-9.

⁴*Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 367.

⁵*Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 297-298.

The theologian does not see God any more than the Metaphysician does. The theologian's knowledge of God, like the Metaphysician's, is also ananoetic in character, but there is this difference that while in Metaphysics the knowledge of God's existence is knowledge attained by and residing in the individual intelligence, in theology, on the other hand, the knowledge of God which one gains resides in God and is reflected from God and we catch the gleam so that from a light which comes from God Himself (revelation) and not from realities about us we know something about the essence or nature of God. "But a capital difference with metaphysical knowledge here intervenes: for metaphysical knowledge of God it is in the heart of the intelligible that our intellect . . . rises . . . to the divine analogue. On the contrary in the knowledge of faith it is in the very heart of the divine transintelligible, in the depth of the Godhead itself that the whole process of knowledge starts in order to return thither, that it makes, by the free generosity of God, choice, in the intelligible universe which falls under our senses, of objects and concepts of which God alone knows that they are analogical signs of what is hidden in Him and of which He makes use to speak of Himself to us in our language."⁶ "No man hath seen God at any time: only the begotten son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him."⁷

Reason is not alone in theology. Reason has for an ally and assistant "faith," by which Maritain means the acceptance of the descriptions or accounts of God which he "believes" have come by revelation from God. Along with the speculative mood of reason man here has faith, that is, the blind acceptance of what is given. It is already clear that Maritain's interpretation of the Thomist conception of revelation differs in no way from the traditional conception of revelation, namely, that revelation is information which comes from God in a supernatural fashion. By revelation comes such notions as sonship, trinity, incarnation

⁶*Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 298.

⁷*John 1: 18.*

and others, and this is precisely the old Thomist view of revelation as "truths dropped from the sky." By faith God is revealed as such, God as He sees Himself, for *we* do not see Him. The man of faith gets knowledge of God as God has it, gets it as in a mirror by the ananoetic mode but he does not get God Himself as an object upon which to lay hold. Grasping God and knowing God in this way belongs to a higher form of wisdom, namely, the beatific vision, the contemplative or mystic experience.

Last of all, then, comes for Maritain the degree of knowledge which he calls Apaphatic theology. It stands above Cataphatic theology, and is the mode of knowledge in which wisdom is left behind and *faith plus love* become the working power in the winning of Divine knowledge. By this road one actually knows God as He is in Himself or in His essence. This knowledge is mystical knowledge, "infused wisdom," sanctifying grace which is a "seed of God," that is, God Himself coming into the soul through one's eager contemplation of or concentration upon or desire for God. This is the highest degree or type of knowledge that man can have of God, and here it may be said that Maritain is not so much interpreting Thomas Aquinas as adding something to the Thomist position. But even this mystical knowledge which Maritain finds exemplified not in Aquinas but in St. John of the Cross, is not permanent but broken and intermittent, and will continue to be so, so long as we are in this world, but it is a foretaste of the beatific vision or perfect knowledge of God which will become ours in the world to come. This is the knowledge of God by experience. Maritain holds that according to St. Paul grace makes us participants of the divine nature. How can we be made gods by participation? he asks. How can a finite subject participate formally in the nature of the infinite? And his reply is that grace supernaturally confers on us the intrinsic power of laying hold of the "Pure Act" as our object. In the intuitive vision of the divine essence the beatified creature will receive infinitely more than the most audacious pantheism has ever dreamed, the infinite and transcendental God Himself.

In this vision the creature becomes the very God Himself, not in the order of substance. Sanctifying grace is the vital germ or rich seed (planted in us here below) of that rich flower which is beatific vision. This seed of God is a physical reality than which nothing can be more positive or efficient. This results in a radical transfiguration by which we become in truth the adopted sons of God. This is how the transfer from natural to supernatural is effected and this, according to Maritain, is the heart of Roman Catholic faith. It is only in the future life, and in the beatific vision that the perfect possession will be enjoyed. However, the beginning of eternal life is here and now. The eternal life begins here on earth, and it should grow in us till the dissolution of our bodies.⁸

⁸*Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 313 ff.

6

Comments On Maritain's Positions

(a) *St. Augustine and Maritain.*

MARITAIN BECOMES INVOLVED in a serious and embarrassing situation in his examination and evaluation of St. Augustine. St. Augustine has been widely regarded as the greatest figure in Western Christianity. According to Maritain, Augustine's knowledge of God is dependent upon love, that is, the sanctifying grace or seed of God which came into his life to save him from "error's ways" and to give him knowledge of God. Augustine had not only this mystical type of knowledge of God but also knowledge which was formulated into communicable form and which we now have as doctrines concerning God, sin, and salvation. Upon these doctrines the Roman church was built, and upon them she rested for at least a thousand years and, for that matter, she still rests or depends upon Augustine's doctrines. St. Augustine was a Mystic who made extensive use of philosophic reflection. He is regarded by very many as the father of Roman Catholic doctrine, and therefore of the Roman Church.

It is surprising to find Maritain on some vital points adversely and severely critical of St. Augustine. He finds many incompletenesses and gaps in Augustine's doctrines. He goes so far as to speak of pathetic weaknesses and unfulfilled possibilities in some of the doctrines which Augustine provided. Maritain is greatly relieved by the conviction that all those pathetic areas of Augustinian doctrine are bridged over or repaired, as the case might require, by the thirteenth-century Angelic Doctor of the Roman Church—Thomas Aquinas. This attitude towards Augustine seems strange and contradictory of the accepted Roman conception of Divine revelation. Indeed, if Maritain accepted the Roman conception of Divine revelation, it is difficult to understand how he could have uttered a word of adverse criticism of Augustine. Was it not St. Thomas himself who affirmed that revelation was "supernatural doctrines, supernaturally revealed"? Why, therefore, attribute to Augustine or to the philosophy of Augustine responsibility for what God did and God gave? Is Augustine not described by Maritain himself as the "discoverer" of doctrine upon which the Roman Church rested at least up to the time of the Protestant Reformation? If there are gaps and incompletenesses in his thought system, why criticize St. Augustine the discoverer? "The one (Augustine) is a fisher of men, the other (Aquinas) an architect of truth. One is the begetter, the discoverer of Christian doctrine . . . the other perfects it, consolidates it. . . . The one is source, the other is fruit."¹ "The philosophy of which St. Augustine made use . . . is incontestably deficient, torn by forces from the ultimate defences and spiritual fructification of dying paganism, the system of neo-platonism."² "What is truly remarkable, and should be regarded as a sign of genius . . . is the instinctive sureness, the supernatural tact with which . . . he himself evades (one cannot say so much for his disciples) the most dangerous pitfalls of Platonism . . . sometimes by leaving unresolved those questions for which the Platonic

¹*Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 358.

²*Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 362.

equipment provides no key (as in the questions of the soul and its origin), sometimes leaving unachieved, in an *indeterminate state which is pathetic*, because it is full of expectation, full at once of promise and reserve those great doctrines (such as the doctrine of illumination) which he could not with the equipment at his disposal, without falling into grave error, have brought to the highest point of exactitude."³

Much more could be quoted to show Maritain's attitude towards St. Augustine which seems to be both a condemnation and a defence. According to Maritain, St. Augustine was a Father of the Roman Church with many defects which, however, did not affect his light; he was a philosopher who was above philosophy and theological science and at the same time covered both, as well as the science of morals. Maritain seems to combine blame and praise of St. Augustine in the same breath. One wonders if his confidence in St. Augustine is as stable as his words sometimes indicate. How a Thomist who believes in doctrine as supernaturally communicated truths could afford to reflect adversely upon Augustinian doctrine or any other doctrine of the Roman Church is hard to understand, for, the Roman Church, particularly since Aquinas, has identified revelation and doctrine. According to Aquinas and his disciple Maritain, doctrine is "given" and hence the puzzle of Maritain's attitude towards many points in Augustinian doctrine. One cannot but wonder if Maritain's criticism of Augustinian doctrine is traceable in any way to his slight Protestant background. Protestantism regards doctrines as formulations in the construction of which the mind and heart have prominent parts to play. Maritain seems to reflect Protestantism at the moment when he is severest in his criticism of Augustine.

The real reason for Maritain's critical attitude towards Augustine may be the fact that the philosophy of which Augustine made use was Platonic and not Aristotilian. Readers of Maritain

will recall his polemic against Idealism as a road to knowledge. *Degrees of Knowledge* opens with such a polemic and also with an announcement of his own unquestioned adherence to Realism. Suddenly, it would appear, Maritain finds himself face to face with the fact that the Father to whom the Roman Church owes most of its doctrinal knowledge was an ardent admirer and philosopher-disciple of Plato, who might be regarded as the father of Idealism. It is not necessary to become involved in this dispute, but one might venture to suggest that Idealism as a way of knowing is not the "evil" which Maritain thinks it is. Idealism as a way of knowing is a way which emphasizes the contribution which the mind makes to knowledge rather than the contributions of the senses, Idealism does not deny the contributions of the senses, but it does insist that there is knowledge which is *a priori*, that is, knowledge which is independent of sense experience. Maritain is such an avowed Realist and starts out with such merciless denunciation of Idealism as a way of knowing that he seems obliged to assume towards the philosophy of Augustine the attitude of adverse criticism and argue that an ardent Aristotilian like St. Thomas Aquinas was the very saviour of the doctrine which St. Augustine had bequeathed to the Roman Church, and this in spite of the fact that this doctrine had served the church for upwards of a thousand years. It seems only fair to say that Maritain's attitude towards Augustine is due not so much to weaknesses in Augustine's positions as to contradictory positions taken by Maritain himself. To assign to Aquinas, as Maritain does, the task of repairing the doctrines of Augustine which had served the church for so many years, is a definite departure from the Thomist and the Roman Church's conception of Divine revelation. Maritain repeats many times that Augustine was the discoverer and not the author of doctrines and that Aquinas was the natural fruit. At the same time he affirms that, by what to us is a strange reversal of process, the fruit had succeeded completely in making the tree good. Later we shall consider the contradiction of Maritain's acceptance at one and the same time

of the realism of Aquinas and Aristotle and the Mysticism of a man like St. John of the Cross. It appears to us that Augustine and his mysticism might have served as a better foundation for the mystical type of knowledge of God to which Maritain clearly gives his personal approval and advocacy.

(b) *Maritain's Knowledge of God.*

There is no doubt that Aquinas believed and taught that knowledge of God's existence is knowledge to which metaphysics leads and is merely an inference from the observance by the senses of the material realities which surround us. Those realities are sufficiently impressive to convince people that back of them is a First Cause which is their home and origin. The Aristotilian-Thomist view of knowledge is that it comes to us through the senses. For Aquinas it was axiomatic that there was indubitable connection between mind and things, and that our powers of knowledge were also indubitable. The truth for Aquinas was conformity between the intelligence and things (*Adaequatio rei et intellectus*). Knowledge comes originally from the senses.⁴ Nothing was more significant for Aquinas than the colossal material works of creation with which we are acquainted through our senses. From this he went on to affirm that it suffices for things to exist for God to become inevitable. "Nothing is more significant than these colossal works. It suffices for things to exist for God to become inevitable. Accord to a point of moss, to the smallest ant, the value of their ontological reality and we cannot escape any longer from the terrifying hands which made us."⁵

Maritain is equally certain that certainty of material things like "moss" and "ants" and all the rest of material creation make us sure of the fact, the existence, of God. In other words, our first certainty is certainty, through the senses, of material things, and following upon that comes certainty of God as the First Cause

⁴*Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 106ff.

⁵*Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 132-133.

of all those material things. John Baillie in his great work, *Our Knowledge of God*, examines this Thomist view that knowledge of God is inferential and adversely criticizes it seriously and, we believe, successfully. Acknowledgment is gratefully made here of all the writer owes to Dr. Baillie's views on this and many other matters. The Thomist view that certainty of God's existence is an inference from the certainty of material things has the backing neither of the Old Testament nor of the New. The fact of the existence of God was not a question at all for the Old Testament writers. They had no doubts on this point, and it was not a case of the people being convinced of God's existence by the physical realities surrounding, but a case of them seeing God in everything and being far more sure of God than they were of things. The Old Testament bases its knowledge of God not on cosmological speculation but on the revelation which he has vouchsafed. "The Old Testament as little thinks of arguing or proving that God may be known as it thinks of arguing that He exists. Its position here again is far in front of such an argument. How should men think of arguing that God could be known when they were persuaded they knew Him, when their consciousness and whole mind were filled and aglow with the thought of Him, and when through His spirit He moved them and enlightened them and guided their whole history?"⁶

It has been said already that the Thomist view finds no support from the New Testament. Throughout the New Testament, and particularly for Jesus Christ, all evil is loss of faith or trust in God. But this loss of faith, as Jesus thought of it and met with it, was not traceable to any doubt concerning the existence of God. What made the loss of faith so very serious was the fact that such loss was found in lives that believed thoroughly in God's existence. The criticism which Jesus levelled against many was not that people had superficial intellectual doubts concerning the existence of God but the far more common

⁶Davidson: *On the Subject of God*, pp. 30-34. Quoted from Baillie: *Our Knowledge of God*, p. 123.

and serious matter of people believing in the reality of God and at the same time living as if there were no God. "Ever since the world was created, his invisible nature, his everlasting power and divine being have been quite perceptible in what he has made."⁷ John Baillie draws attention to the fact that this verse is taken by Aquinas as supporting the view that the existence of God is an inference from material creation. No such use can be made of the verse, Baillie affirms. The verse in no way suggests that God's works prove His existence, but rather that His works show forth certain aspects of His nature.⁸ "He that hath seen me hath seen the father."⁹ For Dr. Baillie these words do not indicate that God is an inference but a Presence. "He is a Presence at once urgent and gracious. By all whom He seeks He is known as a claimant, by all whom He finds, and who in Christ find Him, He is known as a Giver. The knowledge of God of which the New Testament speaks is knowledge for which the best argument were but a sorry substitute and to which it were but a superfluous addition."¹⁰

There is no support for the Thomist view in the Old or New Testament, but support comes for his views from Greek philosophy upon which he was so dependent in many matters. This, in other words, is one of the doors by which there was so much Greek intrusion into Christian thinking. Up to the time of the Sophists no one doubted the existence of God, but from their day on, for a great many years, God's existence was vigorously denied. Plato came to the rescue with the claim that the new science so far from proving the non-existence of God did the very opposite. Plato's answer to the denial of the Sophists was that science was the road to certainty. Through Aristotle that answer became the accepted position concerning God, not only for the Greeks but also for Christians. According to St. Thomas we have no knowledge

⁷*Romans 1: 20.* Moffatt translation.

⁸Baillie: *Our Knowledge of God*, pp. 124-125-156.

⁹*John 14: 9.*

¹⁰Baillie: *Our Knowledge of God*, p. 126.

of any existence except what comes to us through the senses. Anything that is non-sensible we can only know by inference from sensible matter that we can touch or see. God being non-sensible, He can be known to us only through the material things which He created. M. E. Gilson, another well-known follower and interpreter, sums up the position of Aquinas in the following words: "The only road which can lead us to a knowledge of the creator must be cut through the things of sense. The immediate access to the cause being barred to us, it remains for us to divine it with the help of its effects."¹¹

In addition to this natural way of knowing God, there is also, as was pointed out in the last chapter, a second way to knowledge of God, namely, the supernatural way of faith in scriptural revelation. It seems clear, however, that this faith knowledge is not actually superior to knowledge by reason but rather inferior. Revelation is largely identified with Holy Scripture and faith is merely the acceptance of the Scriptural information or the interpretation of this information by the Church. Yet, as E. Gilson points out,¹² there has to be proof of the fact that God has actually spoken in what is termed revelation. According to the Thomist School, no one would ever admit that God has spoken unless one has solid proof of the fact. Such proofs are to be found in history in which the Thomists find the Church as the chief miraculous proof of God's presence. The proper scope and aim of revelation is to provide everybody with such knowledge of God as is required for eternal salvation. But proof has to be furnished that God has spoken. In other words, reason plays a part here as well as in the field of natural knowledge. In fact, so far from faith being a more immediate access to God, it is really more remote. Reason establishes directly the truth which it conveys, but faith does not. It is dependent upon some reliable authority or witness that God has actually spoken. In other words, faith knowledge is inferential, dependent like natural knowledge upon His effects.

¹¹Gilson, M. E.: *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 64.

¹²*Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*, Chap. 3.

It is only superior to natural knowledge in the sense that it comes from more of His effects and greater effects than we find in material things. While the claim is made that faith knowledge is superior to natural knowledge, the fact is that a statement like the following frequently comes from Aquinas: "So far as vision is lacking to it, faith falls short of the order of knowledge which is present in science."¹³ E. Gilson in the Gifford Lectures¹⁴ says, "There is no question of maintaining—no one has ever maintained—that faith is a kind of cognition superior to rational cognition. It is quite clear on the contrary that belief is a succedaneum of knowledge and that to substitute science for belief, wherever possible, is always a positive gain for the understanding."

Is knowledge of God an inference from the things of sense as Aquinas and his interpreters say it is? Kant argued from conscience to God, while Aquinas argued from the things of sense to God. Kant had no objection to anyone arguing towards God's existence. He used practical reason to do so, not theoretical reason as Aquinas did. Many modern thinkers object to argument of any kind being used to prove and know God. Some believe that Kant towards the end of his life gave up trying to prove God as the logical goal of the moral life and came to believe or feel somewhat in the fashion of Schleiermacher that God was actually present in our moral experiences. In other words, he came to think that God comes to us in the moral life and not merely as a deduction from the moral values of life.¹⁵ The same position is taken by John Baillie when he writes, "For it is not merely that through our values we reach God or that from them we infer Him, but rather that in them we find Him."¹⁶

The conclusion of this section is that knowledge of God is not inferential, not a logical deduction either from the things of sense as Aquinas and his interpreters believe, or from the moral values

¹³*Summa 1: 12, xi-xiii.*

¹⁴*The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, p. 25.

¹⁵Farmer, H. H.: *Experiences of God*, p. 76.

¹⁶*Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 462, 470.

of life as Kant held. The fact is that God Himself is the most real fact in the whole world, and we should be more sure of Him and more aware of Him than of anything else in the world. This is no new point of view, this is precisely the view of the Old and the New Testaments, as stated already. "Whether shall we flee from Thy presence?" "God is a spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." The reason people have thought that knowledge of God came to them from the wonders of creation and the great moral values is because people had knowledge of Him before. If they had had no such knowledge of God, they never would have reached it as an inference from environment and moral values. The reason people framed arguments to prove God was because they possessed Him and He possessed them. Anselm, for example, felt that the value of argument was not to create belief in God but to understand it. This was also the position of Augustine: "Understanding is the reward of faith, therefore seek not to understand that thou mayest believe but believe that thou mayest understand." Aquinas made faith the fruit or outcome of logical argument. Augustine made faith and not logic or reason the primary and all-important matter.¹⁷ It is for this reason that the position of Augustine is preferred to that of Aquinas and his interpreters. The position of Augustine resembles closely the Reformed position of such champions of Reformed thought as Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Herrman and others whose views will be examined in later chapters.

(c) *Maritain and Mysticism.*

It was the original intention to comment at some length on Maritain's confidence in mystical knowledge as the highest and most reliable knowledge of God that man can possibly achieve. Limitation of space makes this impossible and a few paragraphs will have to suffice.

Thomas Aquinas recognized this type of knowledge and

¹⁷Gilson, E.: *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*, Chap. 1.

believed that it would be enjoyed by the beatified in heaven, but he was strongly of the opinion that it was well nigh impossible to achieve such knowledge in this life. Examples of this knowledge were very rare and miraculous in character. Aquinas himself had no personal knowledge of what is known as the mystic vision and for him the beatific vision was an experience reserved for the future life. St. Thomas was definitely puzzled by Biblical passages which appear to substantiate the fact of such experiences in this world. Maritain's detailed account of the views of St. John of the Cross indicates clearly that he has more confidence in the fact of such knowledge in this world than Aquinas did. He examines the views of St. John of the Cross with such enthusiasm and in such detail that any reader is convinced that he would advocate the mystical type of knowledge as the only adequate and reliable way of achieving knowledge of God in this world.¹⁸

In what is known as the ecstatic experience, the Mystic claims to come into direct contact with God Himself. Maritain goes so far as to say that in this experience man actually becomes God and this fusion occurs not through any reasoning process but through an immediacy which is beyond reason. "For St. John of the Cross, as for St. Thomas and the whole tradition of Christianity the final aim of human life is transformation into God, to become God by participation, which is achieved in heaven by the beatific vision and the love of beatitude and here on earth by faith and by love."¹⁹ It is by transcending reason and leaving the world behind, in other words, by a process of *unselfing* that this union with a transcendent God occurs. This writer is of the opinion that the Mystic at this point banishes himself from the whole realm of Christian thinking and connects with Hellenistic thought which may be its real home.

The Mystic has amazing confidence in the objective reality with which he becomes united through contemplation, though he

¹⁸See Article on "Maritain," by the late Sir Robert Falconer, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Jan. 2nd, 1943.

¹⁹*Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 394-395.

may be able to say little or nothing about it. "When we see God face to face we shall have an intellectual knowledge of the Divine essence which will be sovereignly clear and limpid; this knowledge will be nevertheless *incommunicable* . . . (for no idea, angelic or human, can adequately represent the Divine essence) and it is by means of ideas and concepts that our knowledge is communicable."²⁰ How real this being can be when it is reached only by leaving everything real in the world and in the mind behind, it is difficult to see. How Maritain with his avowed realism can become so enthusiastic over Mysticism is also difficult to fathom. The mystic claim, however, is that there is nothing subjective about the God with which Mystics unite. It has to be observed, however, that the Christian Mystic has one kind of vision and the Indian Mystic another and the Greek another, which inclines one to the opinion that environment and religious and social education and individual suggestion have much to do with the visions of the Mystics. One feels that it is a case of the Mystic bringing his religious and theological beliefs to the creation of his mystical experiences rather than a case of deriving those beliefs from the experience. This, too, has to be said that mystical experience appears to be extremely individualistic in character and cannot therefore be very authoritative or convincing for those without personal knowledge of such vision experiences. It is difficult to see how even the most widely acclaimed Mystics can escape the charge of being anti-social. The benefits which come to themselves from those visions seem to be the chief end or purpose of their lives. They are always either rejoicing over the wondrous blessings of "vision" or worrying over the dryness of the interval between visions. Some critics go so far as to say that Mystics run counter to the instinct of self-preservation. They seem to lack the courage to live without those rare experiences or to destroy themselves in the effort to gain them. Mystics like St. Theresa and St. John of the Cross hold, however,

²⁰*Degrees of Knowledge*, Chap. 7, p. 382.

that the strength and joy of such experiences more than compensate for the pain endured to reach them. One does not like to question the benefits which the spirit of St. Theresa has brought to very many, but one wonders if her fastings for very long periods could be justified and one wonders if her life would not have accomplished more for God and man if she had lived more normally and therefore, perhaps, for a much longer period in this world.

In conclusion it may be repeated that the Mystic finds his God not in the world but beyond it and that God is conceived of as being absolutely transcendent. God is the *one* absolute Unity as opposed to the manifoldness of created things, and negation and renunciation are the roads by which such an One is to be reached. Leave the world behind, the Mystic suggests, if you would reach the formless infinite which is God. The late Dr. William Morgan did not go too far when he once remarked²¹ that to name such a "formless infinite," "God," was a misuse of language. The great moral realities which awaken a sense of God are met not within but without in the march of history, and in the supreme personalities of the race, above all in Jesus Christ. The mystical conception rests upon the idea that in His essential being God transcends every predicate derived from the world of our experience. It is vain and hopeless to seek to become acquainted with such a being. "Where love is, where purity, justice, mercy, generosity, the spirit of self forgetting service are, there God is. And what we call an experience of God is in large part an experience of the power of these values, when received into our life, to fill it with meaning, strength and joy to lift it up and glorify it. In them God comes to us, and through them He acts upon us to awaken the response of faith. A manifestation of God that transcends the ethical is an empty dream. It is in Jesus that the values of the Kingdom meet us in their purest and grandest form . . . in Him as in none other. . . . But God comes to us to disclose His inmost heart, to condemn our sin, to recall us to His

²¹Morgan: *Nature and Right of Religion*, p. 20.

service, and to create within us the life that is life indeed."²²
 "The Church did not teach, as Plotinus taught, that the transcendent God is beyond rationality and morality. Only its Mystics carried the idea of transcendence to its limit and sought union with God, who is indescribable by mundane predicates. In insisting on the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, the Church secured for the rational and ethical a place inside the Godhead. But that it recognized within limits the right of transcendental Mysticism shows how far it went in the Hellenistic direction."²³

²²Morgan: *Nature and Right of Religion*, pp. 109-110.

²³Morgan: *Nature and Right of Religion*, p. 200.

7

A Truer View of Revelation Appears and Disappears: Martin Luther

THE TITLE OF THIS CHAPTER may appear strange, but it is true and descriptive, as we shall see. It can be said here, however, that while this truer view disappeared, it did not disappear for ever. It reappeared after many years. It came back, and it came back to stay. One purpose of this book is to urge the importance of acquaintance with this truer view, particularly as it reappeared in some great modern champions of Protestant thought. But let us see how the truer view appeared and then disappeared.

The intellectual or doctrinaire conception of Divine revelation examined in previous chapters is not only the Roman Catholic view but it also came to be the traditional Protestant post-reformation view. The early Reformation conception of Divine revelation represented by Melanchthon, Calvin and Luther was indeed very different from the intellectual view of Divine revelation which we have examined. Martin Luther in particular prepared the way for a truer and a more adequate conception of Divine revelation. He realized the importance of fact, par-

ticularly the fact of Jesus Christ and the fact of the Church as the agent by which the love of God in Jesus Christ is made known to men. This is a very radical departure from the doctrinaire view examined and one of the most important contributions ever made to religious thinking. Jesus Christ, and not the doctrines, is the revealing fact of God's forgiving love, and the Church is the means of salvation not because she conveys grace and guarantees the supernatural character of revealed doctrines, but because she teaches the Gospel that the forgiving God is in Jesus Christ. The practical aim or purpose of revelation is the establishment of a redeeming fellowship with God. Christian revelation consists not in the doctrines in which the Church has formulated Christ's significance but in the historic fact and the everlasting fact of Jesus Christ Himself. For Martin Luther, the fact that Jesus Christ is merciful proves Him to be very God and distinguishes Him from those who were not able to show mercy because they were themselves in need of mercy. Therefore, He who is at the same time merciful and good shows us the Father. Luther thus finds God revealed in facts, particularly the historic fact of Jesus Christ, who, sinless, showed pity towards the lost.

We shall return to the consideration of the thought of the last paragraph later on in this book. In the meantime, let us consider Luther's unfortunate falling away from this new and vital conception of Divine revelation as a practical and factual means for establishing fellowship with God. The old dogma of the Roman Church had too strong a hold upon him and he was drawn back to regard Divine revelation and doctrine as equivalent terms. Enumerating the books necessary to salvation, he omitted the Gospels with the significant exception of the Fourth Gospel. In other words, he fell back from his emphasis on the historic Christ to give primacy once more to the doctrinal constructions of His life and work. That is, in the new Church as in the old, Divine revelation came to be regarded as intellectual truth which man could not reach by the exercise of his own reason and faith came to be regarded once again not as appreciation of the worth of fact

but intellectual submission to the voice of authority, as Thomas Aquinas had defined it. The consequences of this falling back from the new and truer view of Divine revelation have been many and serious in the Protestant Church.

There soon developed, for one thing, a dogmatism even more barren and fruitless than that of the Roman Church. It came to be the widespread conviction of Protestant Theologians that one of the most important fruits of the Reformation, if not the most important, was the purification of Christian doctrine. "Protestantism, it was claimed, maintained the true Catholic faith from which the Roman Church had wandered. To restore the true faith and to purge it of all error was widely regarded as the Protestant Theologian's supreme duty."¹ Controversies over the discovery and conservation of sound doctrines have been with us as Protestants from that day to this. As the Roman Church had set up herself as the authoritative guarantee of sound doctrine, so the Protestant Church set up the Bible as the "Rule of Faith," as the "judge to end the strife" of diverse opinions. "The Catholic considers the Church, through the voice of its clergy and their head, the infallible expounder of truth. In every doubt he has an arbiter at his side whose verdict, being the direct result of illumination, is held to be conclusive. The Protestant agrees with the Roman Catholic in holding to an objective standard, but the standard with him is the Bible which he feels authorized to interpret for himself. Denying that the Church is either the unerring interpreter of Scripture, or the infallible guardian of the oral teaching of Jesus Christ and the Apostles which tradition has handed down, he falls back upon the Bible itself. The Bible alone is the 'Rule of Faith.'"² The same kind of *ex opere operato* theory came to be attached to the Bible that Roman Catholics had attached to the Sacraments. The Bible was regarded as a doctrinal code instead of a means of grace and its primary quality was infallibility interpreted as

¹McGiffert, A. C.: *Protestant Thought Before Kant*, p. 141.

²Fisher, Geo. P.: *Supernatural Origin of Christianity*, p. 7.

verbal inerrancy.³ As a protection against the Roman doctrine of tradition on the one hand and the fanatical doctrine of illumination on the other, this Protestant thought identified revelation with Holy Scripture which was the normative authority for faith.

This doctrinaire view of revelation which developed after the Reformation in seventeenth century Protestantism found classic expression in Mozley's Bampton Lectures on the subject of Miracles. His opinion was that the purpose of Divine revelation is to communicate information which the human mind cannot discover by itself and this information is certified by the miracles which accompany its proclamation. This traditional Protestant position is almost identical with the Latin phrase "veritates e coelo delapsae," truths dropped from the sky, which describes the Roman Catholic view of Divine revelation.

Mozley inquired into the use and purpose of miracles, seeking to find out if they answer a necessary purpose and supply a want which could not be supplied in any other way. The purpose he assigned to miracles is that they are the proof of Divine revelation. Revelation to him was revelation because it tells people something they could not know or find out in any other way. Divine revelation for him was information or truth undiscoverable by reason. How are we to know that such information is true? he asks, and the answer he gives is that such information being beyond reason there must be some sign to certify it and distinguish it as a true and reliable communication from God, and this sign can be nothing else than a miracle. "If it was the will of God to give a special revelation there are plain and obvious reasons for asserting that miracles are necessary as the guarantee and voucher for that revelation. . . ."⁴ Mozley argued that miracles were necessary for Divine revelation for, while God could make extraordinary ideas rise up in a person's mind, yet, without miracle, man is without proof of the truth of those ideas. "For supernatural fact is the proof of a supernatural doctrine, while a super-

³McGiffert: *Protestant Thought Before Kant*, p. 146.

⁴Mozley: *Bampton Lectures*, pp. 6-7.

natural doctrine, on the other hand, is not the proof of a supernatural fact" . . . "Christianity cannot be maintained as a revelation, undiscoverable by human reason, a revelation of a supernatural scheme for man's salvation, without the evidence of miracles" . . . "There being two worlds, a visible and an invisible, and a communication between the two being wanted, a miracle is the instrument of that communication"⁵ These are a few of Mozley's words concerning the purpose and necessity of miracles. Our concern for the moment is not what he has to say about miracles but his conception of Divine revelation the truth of which is proved by miracles. Divine revelation for him is information communicated by God with a miraculous accompaniment to prove its truth. The chief purpose of miracle and prophecy according to Mozley is to supply proof of Divine revelation. Divine revelation, according to this way of thinking, is a body of Divine information which reason cannot discover and cannot verify. Such revelation stands in need of some evidence outside the information itself to prove its truth and to justify the reception of it as given from heaven. What could be better than miracles and prophecies? These are the signs attached to this information to assure us that in it God is speaking to us. This is Mozley's understanding of Divine revelation and its proof.

Christianity, according to Mozley and those who think like him, is a system of inscrutable mysteries, undiscoverable by reason and which have no self-evidencing power and can be accredited only by miraculous deeds wrought by the agents of revelation. "No amount of internal evidence," Mozley contended, and contended with the consensus of eighteen centuries of Christian theology behind him, "whether that evidence consisted in the natural adaptation of Christian doctrines to the deepest need of the human heart, or in their fruits in a specific type of individual and social righteousness, could possibly guarantee the truth of revelation, and that just because the internal attestations were rooted in rational reflection, whereas the very essence of revelation

⁵Mozley: *Bampton Lectures*, pp. 19 and 23.

was that it was beyond all discovery by reason. Only miracles, therefore, and prophecy in its traditional acceptation as the clear and intentional prediction of future events, both of them beyond all range of merely human power, could guarantee the Divine character and therefore the Divine truth of revelation.”⁶

Divine revelation so conceived has nothing in itself to commend it to man’s acceptance because it is utterly devoid of self-evidencing power. Its only prop is miracles and should that be knocked from under it or be rudely shaken the whole superstructure tumbles to the ground. “The traditional view of the relation (between Divine revelation and miracles) as purely external, creates an injurious prejudice against revelation, by fostering an exaggerated idea of its need of attestation.”⁷ One direction taken by the eighteenth century reaction was to discount revelation because it seemed to need external support. Another line of attack was to point out that the supports were themselves in need of support which was increasingly difficult to supply. The Bampton lectures provided the critics with the opportunities they desired. An anonymous writer, the author of *Supernatural Religion*, accepts the authority of Mozley on the question and declares that Christianity is a system of inscrutable mysteries, undiscoverable by reason and therefore incomprehensible to reason. Further he accepts the view that Divine revelation has no self evidencing power and can be accredited only by miraculous deeds wrought by the agents of such revelation. This made the task of this anonymous author a comparatively easy one, and his task was to disparage and destroy Christianity. “He had but to make such a vigorous onslaught on miracles as would suffice at least to fill the mind of readers with grave doubts and perplexities respecting the possibility and the verifiableness of the supernatural in general, in order to gain the end of unsettling conviction and detaching minds from the faith.”⁸

⁶Lilley, A. L.: *Religion and Revelation*, p. 7.

⁷Bruce, A. B.: *The Chief End of Revelation*, p. 164.

⁸Bruce, A. B.: *The Chief End of Revelation*, p. 163.

8

Reaction to Protestant Dogmatism

ENOUGH WAS SAID IN THE LAST chapter to justify further consideration of the serious consequences which followed upon Luther's falling away from his own new and epoch making conception of Divine revelation. In the next chapter we shall see how this newer and truer view reappeared in other Protestant thinkers, but it is thought necessary to consider further the seriousness of Luther's falling away from his own declared position because many Protestants, perhaps the majority of Protestants, are still floundering in the bogs into which this error of Luther led them.

The traditional view of the relation between Divine revelation and miracle as purely external, into which Luther fell back, created an injurious prejudice against Christianity as a religion based upon Divine revelation, by fostering an exaggerated and incorrect idea of revelation's need of attestation. The criticism of this traditional Protestant view of revelation was two-fold. First, it was contended, that revelation was unnecessary because natural reason was enough. Second, it was held that even if such Divine revelation were given, it was unverifiable. These

critics did not have a new conception of revelation, as they might have had from Martin Luther, but a new confidence in natural reason. John Tindal, who is the best representative and spokesman of English Deism, in his work entitled *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, published in 1730, believed that an unrestricted common reason was a sufficient guide in religion and disclaimed indebtedness to Christianity, except in so far as it was a return to the simplicity of nature. The natural faculties are enough to gain sufficient knowledge of God. Natural religion is perfect because it is based on this naturally acquired knowledge of God's being and character. Wherever the ideas dictated by reason are violated trouble arises. This perfect religion, the religion of reason, excludes all revelation except such as is merely a republication of the law of nature.¹ Revelation is also severely criticised on the ground of the superstition, immorality, falsehood, persecution, strife and divisions which are cited as springing from faith in Divine revelation. Criticisms are also levelled at the multiplicity of instituted religions and the claim is made that only reason can enable one to choose the true one out of the maze.

The religious movement in Germany, corresponding to English Deism, was the Aufklärung, which may be translated Illuminism. Illuminism has been well described as the idolatry of clear ideas. The authors of the Aufklärung were very numerous. The best known were Lessing and Reimarus. Lessing's general attitude is indicated in two short writings entitled *The Testament of John* and *The Religion of Christ*. In the first, Lessing reaches the conclusion that Christianity consisted in love and not in holding any particular opinions concerning the founder of Christianity. In the second work he regards as incompatible the worship of Christ as God. A third work entitled *Nathan the Wise* has been called his poetical confession of faith. It is a tribute to the religion of reason. Here he affirms that the divisions of positive religion are superficial and unreal, that men are brethren

¹Bruce, A. B.: *Apologetics*, p. 18.

fundamentally, that what is common to different religions is more vital and important than what is peculiar to them, or distinguishes them from one another, and finally that men are to be guided not by what they believe but by what they do. While strongly devoted to the religion of reason, yet Lessing took up an attitude of toleration towards positive religion as, at least, a necessary evil. He was not as critical as English Deists and considered that if positive religions were inventions of priests, they were at least suited to the prevailing state of culture. He felt that there were values in Christianity and Judaism for the human race while it was in its spiritual minority, but that they were destined to be superseded by the pure religion of reason when the race arrived at its majority. In another book, *The Education of the Human Race*, Lessing argues that the religious education which Divine revelation affords is nothing but what the human reason, left to itself, would discover eventually. The only value of the Divine revelation is that it gives the essential truths earlier and more easily. In this schooling he regards the Old Testament as the Primer and the New Testament as the Second Lesson Book. But the New Testament itself was destined to be superseded by the gospel of reason, just as it had superseded the Old Testament. In holding this theory that there was a Divine plan for the religious education of man, Lessing appears more like an apologist than an antagonist of Divine revelation. He was no mere creature of the Aufklärung. Herder described him as the "right thinker among the free thinkers."

These are some of the paths into which Protestantism was led by Luther's initial error of falling back from his new and original conception of Divine revelation. Deism and Illuminism proceed on the false assumption that Divine revelation is education and that Jesus Christ is a mere teacher and Christianity just a system of ideas. Only this way of thinking makes it possible for one even to imagine dispensing with Jesus Christ and the New Testament. "If Christianity were not the religion of redemption itself, as living piety, but only the doctrine of the same, we

could cherish for Christ essentially only such feeling as we entertain towards other great teachers, namely, thankfulness for instruction given at a certain time and for the spirit in which it was communicated in spite of powerful opponents."² There is, as Schweitzer implies, a way of regarding Divine revelation which causes the arguments of Deists and Illuminists alike to lose all plausibility. They assail only the doctrinaire conception of Divine revelation and miracles. What if revelation be such that miracles become integral to revelation and not external to it as these antagonists assume?

Before we undertake to examine the reappearance of the true Protestant view of Divine revelation, let us submit the view of miracles held by these antagonists to the test of the New Testament conception of the miracles of Jesus Christ. While Jesus did not wish His Messianic ministry to become identified with His miraculous works, it cannot be denied that He regarded such works as essential elements in His work. Many strong minds like Harnack, Arnold and even Rashdall exclude the miraculous altogether. The miraculous will continue to be excluded so long as it is regarded as an evidential appendix, rather than an integral part of Divine revelation. Jesus Christ did not perform miracles to prove His Messiahship. As one who revealed God's love and had that perfect fellowship with God that made Him the Messiah, His miracles were a natural part of His work. The purpose of His miracles was not to persuade but to relieve distress of some kind. He was here to manifest God's presence and love and He did this by miraculous works as well as by His wonderful words. The very fact that His miracles were not performed to prove His Messiahship, they can be appealed to all the more as evidence of His Messiahship, just as writing of good poetry proves one a poet though the poetry is not produced for that purpose. Everything about Jesus stimulates our faith in God and His miracles stimulate that faith in no small way. He himself did not disparage the evi-

²Schweitzer, A.: *Die Christliche Glaubenslehre*.

dence of miracles. The supreme purpose which He attached to His miracles, however, was the way in which they helped people in trial and in trouble to come into closer fellowship with God. Marcus Dods speaking of the purpose of our Lord's miracles says: "That purpose was to bring the love of the Father into contact with the woes of men. They were the greatest means, next to the Cross, of manifesting God's love."³ When miracles are regarded as external appendages to Divine revelation which is interpreted as information, they have no evidential value. But when miracles are regarded as an integral part of Divine revelation, interpreted as a redeeming factual manifestation of God, they are important as evidence of God, though their purpose is not to prove anything, but to assist man. Dr. A. B. Bruce says that the miracles of Jesus were acts of "unparalleled love." "Then there is no difficulty in perceiving how congruous the gospel miracles are, both to the innermost spirit of Jesus and to His Messianic work. The constant desire of Jesus was to do good to the uttermost extent of His power, and that was also His supreme duty as the Christ having for His vocation to establish the Kingdom of Grace. He healed men's bodies as well as their souls, because He was able. Whence the power came, whether it was natural or supernatural, is a question of some scientific and theological interest, but not of vital religious importance. The thing to be chiefly noted is that, the acts of healing being witness, Jesus was a man who always did good to the full measure of His ability and opportunity. It is the Divinity of His love and not the supernaturalness of His power that commends Him to our faith as a man, and as the Christ. The healing miracles played their part in the revelation of that love. They were not the whole of the revelation, or even the principal part of it. Preaching the gospel to the poor, and keeping company with people of evil repute were even more significant manifestations of the ruling spirit of the Son of Man. But all three should be taken together

³*The Bible, Its Origin and Nature*, p. 231.

as belonging to the same category, and as integral parts of the Messianic ministry. That Jesus evangelized the poor, associated with the sinful, healed the sick, were each and all signs that He was the One who should come, the genuine Christ of a sin and sorrow-laden world.”⁴

The different words used in the New Testament to describe the miracles of Jesus Christ are very enlightening concerning the significance which the writers attached to those miracles. Four were used: “marvel” (τέρας), “power” (δύναμις), “work” (ἔργον), “sign” (σημείον). The first two words “marvel” and “power,” which are most seldom used to describe the miracles of Jesus, emphasize the miraculous in the sense of amazing or marvellous. The second two are the characteristic descriptions of His miracles. These emphasize that the miracles were significant signs of His work and purpose in the world that were as natural to one with His vocation as our works are to us.⁵ In the days of Jesus people were looking for signs, but He refused to accredit Himself in that way. His miracles were for Him constitutive elements of the revelation. They arose naturally out of His vocation as Saviour. They were part of His ministry and He appealed to them as evidence, not as something external, but as an integral part of His work.

⁴*Apologetics*, pp. 377-378.

⁵Dods, Marcus: *The Bible, Its Origin and Nature*, p. 218.

9

The Truer View Reappears: Schleiermacher and Ritschl

1. *Schleiermacher*

WE HAVE ALREADY NOTED THE reappearance of a truer view of Divine revelation. Now we turn to the statement and closer examination of this view. Divine Revelation is not supernatural information supernaturally communicated, which man cannot reach easily by the exercise of his own reason, but the manifestation of God in activity that has for its practical purpose the establishment of a fellowship between God and man that will result in the transformation of his life. Religion is in its nature not intellectual or speculative but practical. The chief end of revelation comes to be the realization of this redeeming fellowship with God through the gracious manifestation of Himself in history culminating in Jesus Christ. "No point has been more stressed in the thinking of our own age concerning Divine revelation than that it is God Himself who is revealed to us and not mere truths or doctrines about Him—the Divine disclosure always taking the form, not of communication, but of communion."¹

¹Baillie, John: *Interpretation of Religion*, p. 464.

The reappearance of this truer view of Divine revelation is connected with the epoch-making names of Schleiermacher and Ritschl. In chapter seven reference was made to the barren type of Protestantism that developed in the seventeenth century and Mozley's views were taken as the classic expression of this Scholasticism. It was essentially Roman Catholicism, and revelation was regarded as communication of truth in which miracles were external evidential appendages, added on to certify the Divine character of this supernatural information. Reference was also made to the criticisms of this barren Protestant Scholasticism, and the scepticism which followed. Immanuel Kant undertook to rehabilitate faith and while he was not successful, partly through the influence of Hegel, yet we must not fail to appreciate his motives and also the great contributions which he made to religious thought, particularly the view that our religious knowledge comes to us as postulates of our moral consciousness. Our religious assurance, says Kant, is not logical but moral assurance. This is the great merit of his position that he puts our religious affirmations on a different basis from the affirmations of science. They are based upon a different kind of certainty. They are morally conditioned. However, he only knows God as a postulate. His doctrine that phenomena are the only realities, excluded the idea that God manifests Himself. Communion with God is possible only under the slender form that we fulfil our moral duties as Divine commands. Hegel's extreme intellectualism made the rehabilitation of faith all the more difficult. It was against this extreme intellectualizing of religion that Schleiermacher and Ritschl appeared with their contributions to the restoration of the truer conception of religion and of Divine revelation as essential to religion.

In *Addresses*, published under the title *Speeches on Religion*, appearing in the year 1799, Schleiermacher protested against the rationalistic and sceptical spirit of the time. In those *Speeches* he brought out for the first time the place of experience in religion.

In keeping with his emphasis upon feeling rather than ratiocination in religion, he placed great emphasis upon contemplation and surrender before God.² He did not want religion to be absorbed in morality as Kant might suggest. He insisted that religion is something by itself alongside of knowledge and the various activities of the moral life. He criticized severely and effectively the emphasis on dogma and doctrine which he regarded as the externals of religion. He distinguished religion from science and philosophy on the one hand and morality on the other. "Piety cannot be an instinct craving for a mess of metaphysical and ethical crumbs."³ Religion resigns all claims on anything that belongs either to science or philosophy. It does not matter how profound the knowledge may be, that in no way makes it equivalent with religion. "And yet, however high you go, though you pass from the laws to the Universal Lawgiver, in Whom is the unity of all things; though you allege that nature cannot be comprehended without God, I would still maintain that religion has nothing to do with this knowledge, and that, quite apart from it, its nature can be known. Quantity of knowledge is not quantity of piety. Piety can gloriously display itself both with originality and individuality, in those to whom this kind of knowledge is not original."⁴ The religious man is not concerned even to make God Himself the object of his perception or to know Him as the scientist might set Him "at the apex of his science." The religious man is not concerned to know the nature of God in this way. *The pious man knows God in His operation upon him.*

Now if religion is not knowledge and not morality and not a combination of these, what is it? "Only when piety takes its place alongside of science and practice, as a necessary, an indispensable third, as their natural counterpart, not less in splendour than either, will the common field be altogether occupied and

²*Speeches on Religion*, p. 36.

³*Speeches on Religion*, p. 31.

⁴*Speeches on Religion*, p. 35.

human nature on this side complete.⁵ Religion is a third which he describes as "sense and taste for the Infinite," and this, he thinks, belongs to the third element of our mentality, namely, feeling. His position is, essentially, that religion is feeling in which we sense and taste the Infinite. He insists that to have any part in religion, it must be original, it must be experienced, the religious feeling must be one's own, original with oneself. This fellowship with God, which we have in feeling and which is religious experience, he describes in words which seem very closely related to the experience of the Mystic. Certainly Mysticism lies in this direction, but he would not admit that he was a Mystic. For him God is known not as an object of perception but only as He operates upon one.⁶ It is in feeling in this way that the immediate existence of God is presented to us. Our feelings are religious when they thus reveal or present God to us, and it is in ourselves and in our relation to the whole world about us that we find God. There is no need for any outward guarantees for religion beyond this immediate feeling, for all such guarantees tend to lower the conception of religion and make it depend on something less than the highest. "Whence do these dogmas and doctrines come that many consider the essence of religion? Where do they properly belong? And how do they stand related to what is essential in religion? They are all the result of that contemplation of feeling, . . . They are not necessary for religion itself, scarcely even for communicating religion, but reflection requires and creates them."⁷

For Schleiermacher the Christian religion is a religion of reconciliation and redemption of man from that which separates him from God. Man cannot accomplish this of himself. The finite stands in the way of the unity with the Infinite, which he desires. Only the power of God can overcome this. Christianity presupposes the impotence of man and this is its strength. Chris-

⁵*Speeches on Religion*, pp. 37-38.

⁶*Speeches on Religion*, p. 43.

⁷*Speeches on Religion*, p. 87.

tianity's aim is a piety which means complete union with the Divine. Christianity rests in feeling, the feeling of unsatisfied longing which is always felt in the inmost sanctuary of the soul.

Summing up, it may be said that it came almost as a new and wonderful discovery when Schleiermacher, in opposition to the long dominant view, called men from doctrine to religious experience and presented revelation as a communication not of doctrine but of life. He held that it is not through the medium of any intellectual construction that God approaches us, whether that construction comes from philosophy or theology, but through religious experience. Religion springs up in the soul as a result of contact with Divine reality which besets it behind and before. If we ask what this reality is, he replies that it is not Jesus Christ, nor even any moral fact as such, it is the world in its totality. God reveals Himself to us as the Infinite in the finite, the Eternal in the temporal, the Whole in its parts.

While Schleiermacher's name marks an epoch in theology, yet there is an inadequacy about any account of Divine revelation which regards God as the Infinite, the Eternal, the Whole. Such God is scarcely the God of our Christian faith. At the same time it must be said that he took an epoch-making step towards the re-discovery of the truer view of Divine revelation when he brought men to understand that religion is at bottom an experience of God and not an act of intellectual belief and intellectual submission. A second step taken by him was equally important, namely, that he recalled faith from philosophical constructions to Divine fellowship in which God meets us to create a religious experience or life. All subsequent theology bears the marks of this changed viewpoint. It was a point of view taken up and developed by Ritschl.

2. *Ritschl*

The conception of God which thinks of Him as "the Infinite," "the Eternal," "the Whole," is not very exhaustive in the opinion of Ritschl. He conceived first of God as personality, and

then as loving will. "The idea of gods or Divine powers everywhere includes belief in their spiritual personality, for the support to be received from above can only be reckoned on in virtue of an affinity between God and man."⁸ "Theology takes as its fundamental truth the full conception of God as a Person, who establishes the Kingdom of God as the final end of the world."⁹ Not only is God a Person but He is also, for Ritschl, loving will. He believed that the conception of love is the only adequate conception of God that enables man to understand the revelation which comes through Christ. The conception of love is the key to the revelation of God in Christ. "Now, love is that will which accepts, as belonging to one's own end the task of advancing permanently the end of other personal beings of like nature with oneself."¹⁰

Ritschl conceived of Jesus as possessing the value of God. Applied to Divine revelation his doctrine of "value-judgments," which was his characteristic doctrine, means that revelation is addressed not to the intellect but to man in his sin and need, and is only properly appreciated or known through its value in meeting man's practical need. He claimed that the knowledge of Jesus as uniquely Divine and the supreme and final revelation of God to man, was attained only through the experience of His benefits, experience, that is, of what He can do in and for us. "But if Christ, by what He has done and suffered for my salvation is my Lord, and if, by trusting for my salvation to the power of what He has done for me, I honour Him as my God, then that is a value-judgment of a direct kind. . . . Every cognition of a religious sort is a direct judgment of value."¹¹ This is the direction in which one becomes convinced that Christ has revealed God to us.

It is not historically accurate to think that Jesus never claimed

⁸Ritschl, A.: *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 199.

⁹*Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 228.

¹⁰*Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 381.

¹¹*Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 398.

anything beyond a human estimate of Himself. Ritschl affirms that Jesus was conscious of a new and hitherto unknown relation to God. Beyond what *He* brings, no further revelation is conceivable, or is to be expected. "For beyond all doubt Jesus was conscious of a new and hitherto unknown relation to God and said so to His disciples; and His aim was to bring His disciples to the same attitude towards the world as His own."¹² It is on the ground of what Jesus has done for us and suffered for our salvation that we accept this estimate which Jesus made of Himself. It is in the pursuance of His purpose to redeem mankind and reveal to man the love of God that Jesus renders visible His Godhead. The theological problem of Christ's Divinity is solved for Ritschl by an analysis of what He has done for the salvation of mankind. The peculiar sublimity of Jesus is seen where His love meets with no answering love. This makes His grace and truth a perfect revelation of God. He is the perfect revelation of God in His speech, conduct, patience and suffering in connection with His task of realizing the Kingdom of God. Jesus was always inspired by the motive of love and is therefore, for man, equal with God. "In virtue of the motive which inspired Him, namely, love, and the lordship which in His estimate of Himself and in His patience He exercised over the world, He is equal with God."¹³

The purpose of this revelation is for Ritschl a practical one, namely, that the world might become a community of Christ and that man might become a spiritual character supreme over the world. This purpose can be realized only through the establishment of a fellowship with God. Our guilt as sinners who mistrust God stands in the way of this fellowship. Our consciousness of guilt is expressive of the separation between us and God, caused by sin. The only thing to remove this separation is forgiveness, and forgiveness does not mean the removal of the guilt, but the re-establishment of the relation of fellowship with God. "Historical reasons therefore demand that our definition of the

¹²*Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 386.

¹³*Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 483.

idea of justification is synonymous with forgiveness of sin.”¹⁴ God accepts the sinner into that fellowship in which the salvation is to be realized. This acceptance, Ritschl calls “Justification.” Justification in other words is the restoration of the religious relation to God which the sinner had lost and which he could never regain by himself. Justification or forgiveness is the changing of the relation of separation, due to sin and guilt, into a fellowship of trust, and the immediate end of this fellowship is to introduce man into the enjoyment of Eternal life which is freedom or lordship over the world. When man’s mistrust has been changed into positive assent of the will to God, man is reconciled to God. Justification is God’s acceptance of man into His fellowship and reconciliation is man’s change from mistrust in God to positive assent to God’s will and saving purpose. There is nothing judicial about God’s acceptance of man into His fellowship. Jesus connected God’s forgiveness not with man’s power or ability to pay or purchase his way back, but with God’s love as a Father. Ritschl rightly regarded law and religion as not belonging together. The grace of God is the only explanation of the justification which God offers and the reconciliation which man experiences. Scholastic theology, Protestant and Roman, would make God’s justice the explanation of His grace. By this Scholastic way of thinking grace is an accident of justice called into action in the will of God by the merits of Jesus Christ. This is a serious and mistaken view arising out of the thought that sin is an offence which can be wiped out by a fine. Guilt cannot be wiped out, but in spite of it, God is willing to accept man into His fellowship whenever man is ready to substitute positive assent to God’s will for his mistrust in God. Having done this, man is reconciled with God and experiences salvation.¹⁵

¹⁴*Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 40.

¹⁵In my booklet, *What Protestants Believe and Why*, under the heading “Justification by Faith,” p. 10, and again under the heading, “Spiritual Growth,” pp. 19 and 20, a position very similar to what has been stated above is taken.—Author’s Note.

Summing up, we may say that in the theology of Ritschl the idea of Divine revelation occupies a position of immeasurably greater importance than in any previous theology. Traditional orthodoxy, with its view of doctrine as the proper object of faith, was necessarily led to put all stress on inspiration. It is the fact that Scripture is inspired that guarantees the truth of doctrines. For Ritschl faith is neither the acknowledgment of the correctness of traditional facts, nor the acceptance of orthodox propositions, but trust in God's grace. Faith for Ritschl is the attitude which the individual assumes towards Christ as the Bearer of reconciliation and the representative of God the Father. This faith in Christ is not in the truth of His history nor in assent to a formula like the Chalcedonian formula, it is accepting the value of the Divine love revealed in Christ's work for man's reconciliation with God.¹⁶

Divine revelation, for Ritschl, means the facts in which man experiences the power of God and knows that God draws near to him as Father and Saviour. Where are such facts of Divine revelation to be discovered? Ritschl, as we have seen, acknowledges practically only one revealing fact, namely, Jesus Christ. In contact with Christ's moral might and holy love, man feels the hand of God laid upon him and knows God as ONE who forgives sins and calls him into His fellowship and service. It is Christ who grounds within man faith in God. Ritschl, sometimes, uses language that might be taken as meaning that there is no other fact in the world but Jesus Christ possessing independent revelation value. It may not be permissible to attach such exclusive significance to Jesus Christ in this connection, or to isolate Him from other facts which have revelation worth. The matter of importance, at the moment is the truer view of Divine revelation to which we have been led or to which we have returned, namely, that Divine revelation is not information or intellectual truth from God and concerning God, but a gracious manifestation

¹⁶*Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 591.

of God, culminating in Jesus Christ, having for its chief end and object the realization of a fellowship between God and man that will transform man. Divine revelation is made chiefly in gracious acts and deeds of history culminating in the act and fact of Jesus Christ.

10

A Modern Champion of Protestant Thought: John Oman

JUST AS JACQUES MARITAIN WAS selected as a modern interpreter of Thomas Aquinas and champion of Roman Catholicism, so, John Oman has been chosen as a modern champion of Protestant thought.

A particular expression of the truer Protestant view of Divine revelation, referred to in the last chapter, is met with in the writings of John Oman, the late Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge, England. Perhaps no one in recent times has done more than Principal Oman to demonstrate the weakness of the traditional view and to restore to the prominence it deserves the truer view of Divine revelation. It may be well to preface this special reference to the writings of John Oman with a brief summary of the traditional view of Divine revelation, as it appears in Roman Catholicism and traditional Protestantism.

The conception that grew up in the Roman Church affirms that Divine revelation is the complement of reason. Reason, through contemplation of God's works of creation and providence, is

able to reach certain truths which form the basis of what may be called natural religion. These truths by themselves are insufficient for salvation and this necessary supplement God has given to man in formulated doctrines or creeds. These are derived in the last resort from Scripture, and form its essence, and their truth is guaranteed by the Church. They were communicated in a purely supernatural way. Doctrines supernaturally communicated and with a supernatural guarantee—this is the Roman Catholic idea of Divine revelation. Martin Luther's interpretation of Divine revelation differed radically at the beginning of the Reformation Movement from the one outlined above. He realized the importance of fact, particularly the fact of Jesus Christ. God reveals Himself as a forgiving God in Jesus Christ alone and the Church is the agent by which this love of God in Jesus Christ is made known to men. Jesus Christ and not doctrines is the revealing fact of God's forgiving love and the Church is the means of salvation, not because it conveys grace and guarantees the supernatural character of revealed doctrine, but because it teaches the gospel that the forgiving God is in Christ. Faith is no longer intellectual submission, but a personal response based upon personal appreciation of Divine realities which surround us, particularly the fact of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, as we have pointed out, Martin Luther fell away from this new and truer view of Divine revelation and he was finally drawn to regard revelation and doctrine as equivalent terms. He did not fall away from his new and correct conception of faith, but he fell away from the view of Divine revelation which is today the very foundation of Protestantism, and the fact that we have it as a foundation today we owe to Protestants like those mentioned who appreciated the contribution to Christian thinking which Martin Luther made, more than Martin Luther himself did. He fell back from his emphasis upon the historic fact of Jesus Christ to give primacy once more to the doctrinal constructions of His life and work. In other words, Divine revelation in the new Church as well as in the old came to be regarded as supernaturally communicated truth

and faith came to be looked upon as intellectual submission. Throughout the period of Protestant Scholasticism down to Scheiermacher the conception of Divine revelation was in no essential respects different from the Roman Catholic view. The cardinal Reformation meaning of Divine revelation was lost. Against this brief summary of the traditional conception of Divine revelation as a background we shall present the views of John Oman a great modern champion of Protestant thought and we shall do so under three headings: (a) The Meaning of Divine Revelation; (b) Man's capacity for the Apprehension of Divine Revelation, or The Meaning of Faith; (c) The Proof of Divine Revelation. These we shall consider in this order.

(a) The Meaning of Divine Revelation.

We have seen the emergence of the view that Divine revelation is not supernatural information supernaturally communicated, but the manifestation of God in activity that has for its practical purpose the establishment of a fellowship between God and man that will transform man. Religion is in its nature not intellectual or speculative as the Roman Church had taught, but practical. God graciously manifests Himself in history culminating in Jesus Christ and the chief purpose of this manifestation is that man might enter into a redeeming fellowship with God the Father.

Doctor Oman championed this point of view, namely, that the end or purpose of Divine revelation is practical in character and is described by the word "reconciliation." Divine revelation is not information dropped out of the "blue" in the way the Roman Church affirms ("veritates e coelo delapsae"). Divine revelation is not a dictation from heaven. "For revelation in the sense of a word dictated from heaven about God's mind there and conveyed by an inspired writer as a mere scribe, science and criticism alike leave little room."¹ Dr. Oman is severely critical of the word "Revelation" written with a capital "R", that is,

¹Oman, John: *Grace and Personality*, p. 145.

of revelation as information given once and for all, which is supplementary to that which man can gain by the exercise of his own reason. This way of thinking is responsible, according to Dr. Oman, for all the perplexities concerning the Bible which the Church has sought to meet by an obscurantism, by an effort to prevent inquiry "which is guilty of fearing that truth cannot shine in its own light, but must, as it were, be lacquered with a kind of luminous paint of submissive piety."² Divine revelation for Oman is God's activity on behalf of His children whom He desires to develop until they have reached the level of perfect freedom. From all eternity, he thinks that God has had this goal in mind and has been manifesting Himself in His infinite goodness and love to achieve this goal. If man stands over against environment, in the power of the *sacred*, it becomes luminous with a "light which never was on land or sea."³ Even the wayside flower, for those who have eyes to see, becomes eloquent of the Father's love. "If a word of God is inspired as it inspires us to lay ourselves open to God's appeal it approves itself as it *reconciles* and not as it *informs*. Only as it enables us to accept His purpose in the world and submit to the measureless demands of His love and seek our peace in His rule of righteousness does it make us know that we know God."⁴

That the essence of Divine revelation for Oman is expressed in the word "reconciliation" is shown by the emphasis he puts on the idea that God is concerned not only to reveal Himself but also to be understood. God is content not merely with directing the world according to His own wise rule, heedless of our understanding of that guidance. He is anxious that man should understand it and become freely reconciled with it, which means reconciliation with life's disciplines and duties. God seeks to overcome in the freedom of a true reconciliation man's alienation against His rule or mistrust of His will. It is this

²Oman, John: *Grace and Personality*, pp. 162-163.

³Oman, John: *Natural and Supernatural*, p. 325, pp. 330 and 340.

⁴Oman: *Grace and Personality*, p. 147.

concern to be understood and the efforts to enable His children to understand that truly reveal God. Divine revelation means God Himself, eager that man should freely and willingly accept the guidance of His will.⁵ God raises up prophetic souls for this task of making man understand His rule and making man willingly submissive to it. These souls embody in varying measures, for God accomodates Himself to the medium, the rule of God and his loving concern to open man's eyes to the right of that rule and the wisdom of accepting the same. This task and this embodiment, according to Oman, are met with supremely in Jesus Christ. He is the complete embodiment of the rule of God and therefore the greatest power to make people understand it and become reconciled with it by their own free choice. Jesus Christ, in his opinion, is the supreme revelation of God because He is the fullest embodiment of God's rule and the greatest power to reconcile people with it. Doctor Oman's complete statement of Divine revelation is that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." "As Christ helps us to attain this gracious relation to God's children, we learn how He came from the bosom of the Father to declare Him, and how God is in Him reconciling the world to Himself."⁶

Eager as God is in His love to persuade man into the acceptance of His will, never does His persuasion degenerate into coercion. God is careful to respect, preserve and perfect man's freedom. It would be easy for God to impose His intentions upon man, but in doing so He would destroy the freedom He is so eager to maintain and develop. "To lay hold of man by infalible and final proclamation and dare him to disobey would not have been to implant in Him the Divine image, but, as it were, to put out the fire by the blaze of the sun."⁷ The greatest thing about God's manifestation of Himself is not that it subdues man but rather that it makes man free with the liberty of the

⁵Oman: *Grace and Personality*, p. 164.

⁶Oman: *Grace and Personality*, p. 158.

⁷Oman: *Vision and Authority*, p. 97.

children of God, and this is a difficulty which only an omnipotent God could accomplish.

Dr. Oman believes that the patience of God is the greatest feature of God and the very key of experience and of history. Man often rebels against the difficulties of life and sometimes attributes them to what he terms the indifference or weakness of God. Oman's answer to this attitude is that God is neither indifferent nor powerless but patient. Although deeply concerned for man, God cannot practice compulsion for that would be to destroy man in the very effort to help him. God permits or tolerates man's trials and difficulties, not without sorrow and pain to Himself, but this price God pays to preserve man's freedom and man too must pay a price, namely, bearing the burdens because he is so slow to learn the folly of persisting in his own ways. "God's tolerance is the key to experience and history. The central fact of human life is God's patience. He will not force His mystery on us. He will lead us up to it."⁸ "The Cross is the consummation of all revelation because it displays the Divine method, not as the masterful compulsion of power, but as the condescending, patient, self-sacrificing device of an infinite tolerant and wise love."⁹

Oman believes that God reveals Himself in the sacred values that are everywhere to be found, not only in prophetic personalities but also in material environment and in history. He is of the opinion that the task is not to lay open to us the values in which God is to be met but rather to lay us open or to open our eyes to see God in the values that are always around us.¹⁰ He is severely critical of the Mystic who declares that we have to leave the world and ourselves in a sense to gain a vision of God. We can neither know God nor anything else apart from the world, but neither can we know the world apart from God.¹¹ He con-

⁸*Vision and Authority*, p. 225.

⁹*Vision and Authority*, p. 226.

¹⁰*Grace and Personality*, p. 167.

¹¹*Grace and Personality*, pp. 157-158.

tradicts the mystic view in another work, which is his greatest, namely, *The Natural and Supernatural*, where he presents¹² the view that we can discover in the natural, in spite of its evil, a real manifestation of God and also the unfolding of a Divine purpose. He believes that what is called the order of nature is not a closed system of material impacts, but as Wordsworth says, "Something far more deeply interfused." The Newtonian world of matter and impact is no longer a possible conception according to Oman. He agrees with those who do not regard matter and motion as the sum total of existence. He holds that advances in science confirm the view that there is no real identity and uniformity to be met with in the material universe. Advances in physics are proving the most effectual cure for this ignorant faith in matter and motion as the inmost substance rather than the most abstract symbol of the sum of existence. No two things, no two events in our real world are ever the same in development and progress. Thoughts of identity and uniformity are mere devices for dealing with an experience of endless variety. It is much truer to say that the universe is a life than to say that it is a mechanism.¹³ Such appreciation and such insights into the value and meaning of the material world transcend its mere scientific comprehension and give us awareness of a Power which is not material but spiritual and man, in the opinion of Oman, was from earliest stages of civilization conscious of such a spiritual Presence which overshadowed man's littleness.¹⁴ Oman holds that the natural is not merely natural and that the material is not to be wholly explained mechanically and that it possesses qualities which are living and almost personal which respond to man's contact and give man certainty of "Another" looking out through or from the materials which he sees. In other words, Oman regards the material world as a fact in which a Divine Being at the heart of things manifests Himself to man.

¹²P. 410.

¹³*Natural and Supernatural*, p. 250.

¹⁴*Natural and Supernatural*, pp. 87, 92-93.

Oman goes on to assert that in the experience of living, man meets with God. Not only in great personalities and in nature but in experience man meets with God. If man is to grow in freedom, if he is not to be cramped and rebellious in life, he must earnestly seek to be reconciled to life with its joys and its sorrows, triumphs and trials. He must regard all his trials as purposeful disciplines and all his tasks as duties sent from God. The appeal of the true, the beautiful and the good must inspire faith that will accept all things as either sent from God or permitted or tolerated by God for a good purpose. Adopting this attitude and persisting in it man's freedom increases, his own worth is realized, his consciousness of partnership with God is deepened and his awareness of a Divine Being ruling with man's perfect sonship as His goal clarifies. Every step or achievement in reconciliation or expanding freedom calls man to higher altitudes and points him to the final goal of perfect liberty where God's laws will not be imposed from without but obeyed from within the heart, upon the walls of which they are written indelibly.¹⁵ Not only is individual experience a fact in which people meet with God, but also race experience or History is a fact which manifests God. History becomes revelation for those who put to the test in their lives the awareness of God which History brings them and find it helping them to rise above their difficulties as all, under God, working together for good. Those who have met and those who continue to meet with God in History are those who refuse to be the playthings of circumstances and who have come to be confident of a Divine purpose in life which is working towards the goal of perfect truth and righteousness with which nothing can begin to compare.¹⁶ People come to appreciate the worth of revelation facts through the experience of their benefits. Speaking of the Bible, Oman said these significant words: "Only when the life had proved its spiritual power was it put into writing to be a permanent spiritual heritage; and each successive age can

¹⁵*Grace and Personality*, p. 126.

¹⁶*Vision and Authority*, p. 89.

accept it as it presents the supreme evidence of being a Divine revelation through the renewed display of its unexhausted powers."¹⁷

(b) *Man's Capacity for the Apprehension of Divine Revelation*
(The Meaning of Faith).

In thinking of the capacity we have for apprehending Divine revelation or the meaning we attach to religious faith, we must keep clearly in mind the traditional view of Divine revelation, namely, that it is information from God and concerning God which man cannot reach easily by the exercise of his own reasoning powers, and, therefore, according to the traditional view, to be accepted by an intellectual submission. For the traditional mind the weakness of man's reason is the recognized necessity for Divine revelation. The main ground on which revelation is regarded as supernatural, according to the traditional view, is that it is always accompanied and authenticated by the miraculous. This is the view of the Roman Church and this is the view which Mozley presented in his Bampton Lectures of 1865. For Doctor Oman, Divine revelation is not information but the manifestation of God in activity which seeks to reconcile the world unto Himself, and the manifestation must be recognized by man independently of any external dominating authority. "Except as we see for ourselves nothing is true, except as our hearts reverence nothing is pure, except as our purpose is consecrated, nothing is good."¹⁸

The meaning or the value aspect of things is the realm of true knowledge and the gateway to reality. In this realm meanings or values which we sense to be holy or sacred, that is, incomparably great, admit us into the all inclusive Supernatural which is the sphere of religion.¹⁹ These sacred values give us the immediate conviction of a special kind of objective reality insepar-

¹⁷ *Vision and Authority*, p. 198.

¹⁸ *Grace and Personality*, p. 186.

¹⁹ *Natural and Supernatural*, p. 69.

able from the sense of the holy. The sacred is a valuation which speaks to man of another reality than that which he knows by his senses. Value-judgments are framed on the ground of the impression made upon one by an object, the impression being necessarily related to the meaning or value of the object. Theoretical judgments, the judgments of the scientist, are framed on the ground of what has been seen or discovered or perceived in the analysis of the object, there being no concern over meaning or value. They have for the ground of their validity the compulsion of perception and logical thought. There is an object in both cases. Without an object there could be neither impression from value nor data from analysis. Both are valid types of knowledge and related to one another since the mind is one, and both the object and the mind contribute factors to knowledge. Religious and scientific knowledge are both valid though it may be permissible to affirm that it is the meaning of things more than the analysis of them which takes one to the heart of things. Science works in the world of forms and religion in the world of meaning, and it is in the latter that the inner nature of things comes to light. The scientific method is analysis, it reduces things to their constituent elements, and seeks to arrive at a convenient and descriptive formula. The religious method is to evaluate, seeking to grasp meaning, purpose, and the value of things in their wholeness.²⁰ We might distinguish between scientific and religious knowledge by saying that they differ as judgment of fact differs from judgment upon fact. Both assert a fact. But while science merely states the fact, religion adds to the statement of fact judgment upon it, or affirms the value or meaning it may possess.

What is man's capacity for appreciating sacred value, for gaining religious knowledge? Doctor Oman would answer this question by quoting the words of Dr. H. R. Mackintosh:²¹ "For Christian minds, religious knowledge means first and foremost that knowledge of spiritual reality, and supremely of God, which

²⁰*Natural and Supernatural*, p. 96.

²¹*The Christian Apprehension of God*, p. 37.

we have through faith." But what meaning does Oman attach to "faith" in this sentence? Both he and Mackintosh would agree that religion ceases to be spiritual when man's moral independence is sapped as it seems to be by the traditional Roman and Protestant conception of faith. Not even to an apostle would either of these thinkers surrender the right of measuring Divine revelation by our own need and still less the duty of proving it in our own lives.²² Faith, for John Oman, is only spiritual when it is won by man's own insight into truth. Faith is trust awakened by God's manifestation. When man sees with his own eyes and loves with his own heart he discerns God's purposes even in life's perplexities and His promises in the gross things of the world. It is by communion or friendship, as Dr. H. R. Mackintosh might express it, that man comes to know God, according to Dr. Oman. "Faith in God is analogous to trust in a great and noble friend."²³ In a word, the condition of meeting with and knowing God is not any intellectual acuteness and certainly not any intellectual submission, but moral earnestness and submission. These give man insight into meanings and values that are sacred, which manifest Infinite Reality or God. To such a vision "the wayside flower becomes eloquent of the Father's care, the equal rain tells of the Father's love and pardon of His erring sons."²⁴

(c) *The Proof of Divine Revelation.*

The traditional Roman Catholic notion was that miracle was the main proof of Divine revelation. Mozley in his Bampton Lectures took the very same stand. Divine revelation for the Roman Church is supernatural truth supernaturally communicated and the greatest proof that it is from God is some miraculous accompaniment. For John Oman, for whom Divine revelation is not information but God Himself eager to restore man to His

²²*Vision and Authority*, p. 196.

²³Mackintosh: *The Christian Apprehension of God*, p. 58.

²⁴Oman, John: *Paradox of the World*, p. 92.

fellowship, eager to remove any alienation or mistrust in man's life, miracles, as something external to revelation, could never be regarded as proof of it. Divine revelation, as the manifestation of God Himself, for the practical purpose of reconciling man with God, requires a different kind of proof. The proof of Divine revelation, as John Oman understood it, can only be the results produced by it in man's life. The awakening of trust is the greatest result from Divine revelation and therefore the greatest proof that the revelation is from God. His alienation from God, and his mistrust of God are removed from man's life when the manifestation or persuasion of God has been successful with him. The alienation in man's life is changed into confident fellowship and that is the greatest proof that God has made Himself known to man. This fellowship gives man a sense of victoriousness and that is another proof that the fellowship is with the Divine. Man is able to look at things as working together for good. Man and the events of his life are no longer at enmity with each other. He is able to regard as Divine disciplines things which he was accustomed to regard as imposed injuries. He is able to look upon the most difficult things not as evidences of God's indifference, but as things permitted for a good purpose, or tolerated because man must learn for himself and by himself to avoid his foolishly independent ways. Man gains freedom in the sense that he no longer feels himself hemmed in and hurt by circumstances. What he once regarded as impositions he now accepts as disciplines and duties, and what he used to take as evidences of God's indifference and cruelty, giving rise to mistrust and alienation, he is now able to look upon as evidences of God's love, patience, tolerance, endurance and concern for man's freedom, creating in his heart faith, hope and love. "The highest proof of God's revelation is that it sets a man free with the liberty of the children of God."²⁵ The life of Jesus Christ furnishes Oman with the most convincing evidence that victoriousness

²⁵*Vision and Authority*, p. 113.

is the real proof of Divine revelation. The prophet too was evidence of the same thing. The prophet was so reconciled with life as to be able to gain a blessing from every event, and no event could alienate him either from peace or service. It was in the living of his own life and the meeting of his own problems and difficulties that the prophet became a channel or window through which others saw God. The masterfulness of the prophet's life persuaded people to seek similar victoriousness along the same road of trust in God.²⁶

It was to break down the alienation which blinds men to graciousness in anything that God called all prophetic souls. Their aim was to open the eyes of others to God, even in the trials and difficulties of life, and their equipment for this work was that their own eyes were open to see God, and their own lives were reconciled with God and life in a manner that brought them peace and triumph. This equipment and spirit made them effective in the work to which they were called. Out of his own experience the prophet was able to declare that this world with its joy and sorrow, success and failure, knowledge and ignorance is a world in which God is to be found, and found supremely in the fact that He never imposes His will upon anyone but suffers the agony and exercises the patience of waiting for man's willing acceptance and co-operation.²⁷ The prophet also taught, with the confidence born of experience, that to accept God's will and to trust in Him is to be victorious no matter how adverse the circumstances. In spite of all its evil, the prophet regarded the world as God's world in which God's rule of love would be the final might. This attitude gave the prophet a triumphant spirit that nothing could snatch from him and he challenged his day to adopt a similar attitude as the only hope of a "New Jerusalem" replacing the existing evil world.

Oman did not identify the prophetic spirit with that of Jesus Christ, but neither did he altogether distinguish it from it, except

²⁶*Natural and Supernatural*, pp. 446-447.

²⁷*Grace and Personality*, pp. 180-181.

in so far as the wall is to be distinguished from the corner-stone. Jesus Christ, according to Oman, was the One who in His life among men demonstrated more than all others that trust in God alone makes for mastery. His victoriousness is the greatest persuasion for others to seek after God. He is entitled to the name "Prince of Peace" not only because he *fought* for peace but also because he possessed peace which did not come from the world and which the world could not take from Him. He was not very optimistic concerning the conditions of the world and yet he had glowing optimism concerning the presence of God in the world. The morality He found in the world was but respectability, and the purest religion but formalism, and the greatest outward show of sincerity but blackest falsehood—yet rising above it all and giving Him unconquerable victoriousness was His confidence in the ultimate and fast approaching rule of God. His triumphant spirit is revelation of God when it persuades men into seeking and finding God for themselves and proving in their own lives that trust in God's rule brings peace and triumph in the midst of the most disturbing and destroying circumstances.

It is clear, from what has been written, that, for Oman the proof of revelation is not any miraculous accompaniment, but victory in life that follows upon daring to accept Divine revelation and living under its guidance and depending upon it to show life's meaning, purpose and goal. "A revelation of God can only reflect itself in a faith which lives by it."²⁸

²⁸Oman: *Problem of Faith and Freedom*, p. 363. See also *Natural and Supernatural*, p. 365.

11

Consequences of the Truer View

THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT CONCERNING the newness and the superiority of the conception of Divine revelation represented by the Protestants whose views have been examined. This truer view is radically different from the traditional conception.

(a) The Roman Catholic Church regards Divine revelation as a body of information supernaturally communicated from God and concerning God, which human reason could not easily obtain by itself. The Protestant point of view is that Divine revelation is not information but manifestation; not information from God or concerning God, but God Himself coming to man for the practical purpose of restoring man to the fellowship he had lost through loss of faith, and seeking to accomplish this purpose not by any coercive exercise of His power, but by the gracious, patient and persuasive exercise of His love. Divine revelation for the Protestant is not intellectual in character, as it is for the Roman, but practical or factual in character.

(b) For the Protestant, God reveals Himself to man in various facts and is not a direct and piercing shaft of formulated infor-

mation as the Roman Church contends. For the Protestant, the material world is a revelation-fact because the material is for him not merely material and because it cannot be wholly explained mechanically. There are living and almost personal qualities about the material world that make it, in a measure, respond to man's touch. The experiences of life are facts in which God manifests Himself. Not only individual experiences are facts in which God meets us, but the experiences of the race, as they are bundled together in history, are manifestations of God. History with its various movements reveals a Divine purpose that is working for a goal or consummation, a final kingdom of perfect freedom. History presents us with "a power not ourselves working for righteousness." The greatest revelation-facts are great personalities who are agents of God in connection with the practical purpose of revelation. These personalities embody the will and purpose of God, and, therefore, are the greatest powers for effecting a reconciliation between man and God—which is the practical aim of Divine revelation for Protestant thought. According to Roman Catholic thought, if great personalities reveal God it is only because God conveys specific information through them as passive agents, and the more passive they are, the more genuine the revelation through them. It is a very different view that regards these personalities as revelations in themselves, as Protestantism does, not because they are passive agents but active agents who have experienced reconciliation with God and know that reconciliation means victoriousness in life, even in the midst of apparent defeat and disaster.

(c) Another consequence of the changed position is that Divine revelation is apprehended by man, neither through his intellectual acuteness, nor his intellectual submission, but by the approval of his heart and will, made sensitive to the goodness and holiness of God by a condition of purity, moral earnestness and childlike trust. Faith for a Roman Catholic and faith for a Protestant are two very different things. Faith for a Roman Catholic is acceptance of what is given, is submission to the voice

of authority. The Roman Church says that Divine revelation is information from God and it is the duty of the "faithful" to accept that information because authority says so. The Church is the authority which decides what is from God and what is not. Faith for the Protestant is a very different matter. For him faith is a personal response which he makes to Divine realities which surround him on every hand. Faith for him is a personal response growing out of personal appreciation.

(d) Still another important result of the changed position is to be noted in connection with the proof of Divine revelation. For the Roman the supernatural information of revelation had to be accompanied by some miraculous occurrence or event which served as proof of the truth communicated, that is, served as proof that it was information dropped from the sky. For the Protestant, Divine revelation is God's manifestation of Himself, and, therefore, the proof looked for is the result which the manifestation produces in man's life, and this result takes the form of trust, freedom and victoriousness. God being in the world, reconciling the world unto Himself, gives man the consciousness and the conviction that all things are working together for good. There is no possible defeat for a man with such an attitude and that is the proof that the revelation is Divine and adequate.

(e) The final consequence of the changed position is perhaps the most important of all, namely, that we reach a view of Divine revelation which is true to the New Testament. This is a very great claim to make for the Protestant conception of Divine revelation as opposed to the Roman Catholic view, and, therefore it will be necessary to substantiate the claim with some care and at some length. The New Testament conception of revelation is inseparably bound up with its doctrine of the Spirit. In Old Testament times the Spirit was regarded as a power coming from God. The prophet was believed to be the special channel for this power. *God was revealed in the activity of the Spirit.* In the New Testament, the Spirit is connected with Jesus as its source. He was believed to possess the Spirit in special measure.

The earliest gospel opens with the story of the Spirit falling like a dove upon Jesus. St. Luke and St. Matthew, in a similar way, thought of the Spirit as the constant possession of Jesus, which is the equivalent of saying that God was in Christ. *In other words, the revelation of God is not information from God or concerning God, but God Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ.*

Jesus, Himself, had little to say about the Spirit and people have been surprised that He should have had so little to say about a conception of Divine revelation that was so prominent in Old Testament times. The explanation of this is that He knew Himself to be in immediate contact with God who was revealing Himself in Him. Jesus felt that He was one with God in mind and will, for the purpose of exercising love and justice and compassion.¹

In St. Paul we find no sharp line between God and Christ. "Very striking is the way in which the Apostle alternates between God and Christ, attributing the same functions and attributes now to the One and then again to the Other."² He spoke of the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ interchangeably and his conception of revelation is clear in the great words: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."³ St. Paul identified Christ with the creative and redeeming power of God. This was his explanation of the immediacy of Christ's relation to and revelation of God. St. Paul all but applied the title Logos to Jesus, and by the Logos he meant the personalization of the creative and redemptive powers of God.

The Fourth Gospel gave a similar explanation of the immediacy of Christ's relation to God, and in the prologue to the gospel, which is organic to the gospel, the author gave Jesus the title of Logos. "In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was God . . . all things were made by Him."⁴

¹Scott, E. F.: *The Spirit in the New Testament*, pp. 79 and 240.

²Morgan, W.: *The Religion and Theology of Paul*, p. 43.

³2^d Corinthians 5: 19.

⁴John 1: 1 and 3.

In other words, the immediacy of Christ's relation to God was not satisfactorily explained for St. Paul and the Fourth Evangelist by saying merely that the Spirit of God was in Christ. They went further, saying, as St. Paul put it, that "God was in Christ." St. Paul made this identification of God and Christ in his defence of Christianity against the Gnostic heresy. He told the Gentile critics that the new religion would not be enriched, but rather impoverished, by adding to Christ elements from pagan philosophy and from Judaism. He claimed that the whole universe was centred in Jesus Christ and that worship of Him made all others unnecessary. Christ was one with that eternal principle through which all things had come into being. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: *Who is the image of the invisible God the first born of every creature.*"⁵

Neither St. Paul nor the Fourth Evangelist, however, dispensed with the view of the Spirit as the agent of God's revelation. While the Spirit was not the explanation of God's revelation in Christ, yet it was for St. Paul the explanation of God's revelation to himself and in himself and also of the whole new life of the Christian. It was God's Spirit that had to do with his own conversion and his dependence in many matters was upon the Spirit. Neither did the Fourth Evangelist dispense with the Spirit which became operative after the death of Christ and which made Christian truth responsive and adjustable to the changes which came from time to time. Those who had not seen Christ were not to think that they had a lesser revelation of God because they had to depend on the Spirit.

The Spirit, for the New Testament, was the power of God in the world effecting a practical purpose. For St. Paul and the Fourth Evangelist, the Spirit was the vehicle of revelation in their own lives and the explanation of the whole new life of the Christian. In other words *the revelation of God was in the Spirit*

⁵*Colossians 1: 14-15.*

of God and not in any deposit of information from God. Jesus, however, revealed God, according to St. Paul and the Fourth Evangelist, not alone because He possessed the Spirit as the other Evangelists believed, but because He was God, the embodiment of those Eternal principles through which God creates and redeems.

12

Revelation in the Life of Christ

CHRISTIANS DO NOT DENY revelation value to other facts, but they regard Jesus Christ as the crowning fact of Divine revelation. Christians attach revelation significance to the natural world with its uniformity, unwearying order and dependability. Christians also attach revelation value to history with its definite movement towards a goal of moral excellence. But it is in great personalities and supremely and incomparably in the Person of Jesus Christ that the Christian meets with God. Down the ages great personalities have been God's co-workers or agents in the work of reconciliation. They have been effective agents of revelation not because they are passive agents in the hands of God, but because they are themselves reconciled with God and are, therefore, daily exhibiting victoriousness in their own circumstances. Outstanding among such reconciling agents were the prophets of Israel. In the souls of persons like them, Christians see the purposes of God working themselves out in the world. The secondary interests of life, which bulk so largely in ordinary good men, were almost lost for them. Their lives were given to the greatest object,

namely, the service of the Kingdom of God. Great souls like those of the prophets alone seem to have the inner freedom and creative power to grasp, as a life purpose, that which, on the ground of its value, Christians take to be the purpose of God exhibited in its height and breadth and obligation. Christians believe that such a revelation of God comes to us on an incomparably high level in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to the consideration of these in order we now turn.

As preliminary to this consideration it may be stated that an unbeliever or non-Christian is not going to be convinced by a mere statement like the above. Only those with experience of Jesus Christ will be appealed to by such a statement, just as only those with such experience can make such a statement or speak authoritatively concerning Jesus Christ. Speaking of the objective grounds of man's certainty of communion with God through Christ, Herrmann writes: "The rise of faith as the consciousness that God communes with us cannot be forced. It remains the incommunicable experience of the man who learns to believe; it is impossible to demonstrate the necessity for such a confidence to a man in whom it does not exist."¹ Examining the possibility of confessing the Divinity of Jesus Christ, Herrmann writes very significant passages, for example, "To confess the deity of Jesus means, obviously, to confess that Jesus is God. It is clearly impossible for a man to appropriate this thought to himself so as to find any meaning in the words, unless Jesus has led him to break with his past and to enter upon a new existence. If we are to understand the proposition that Jesus is God, it is necessary first of all that we know Jesus Himself. . . . It is what we experience in the man Jesus that first gives definite content to the confession of the Deity of Jesus."² Something, indeed, the unbeliever may be able to say as a spectator of the course of history. Even here the absence of an experimental knowledge will hinder him from penetrating to the deepest secret of the

¹*Communion with God*, p. 102.

²*Communion with God*, pp. 126-127 and 128.

historical influence of Jesus. Acquaintance with the redeeming work He has accomplished in the lives of others, helps one to appreciate His revelation significance. Then too, one is able to appreciate Him more when one realizes that He initiated a movement out of which arose the Christian Church. In such a movement He reveals God seeking to draw the world into a great Divine fellowship. Through the Church, Christ has been the mightiest moral and religious force that ever entered the world. Christians who know Him and know about Him in these ways believe that He reveals God *in the impress of His personality, the appeal of His Cross and the everlasting power of His Resurrection.*

One of the great distinguishing marks of the life of Jesus Christ was that "He was what He taught and He taught what He was."³ Indeed, He invited people to declare not what they thought of His teachings, but what they thought of Him.⁴ When one recalls the cardinal features of His teachings concerning humility, self-forgetfulness, purity, mercifulness, generosity, love, service, self-sacrifice and absolute devotion to God, it will be seen how true it is to say that the study of His life is the all important matter. He is the embodied ideal of the righteousness He preaches. Regarded merely as a great teacher, He is the acknowledged head of all the great teachers. The Fourth Gospel expresses it correctly when it says: "Never man spake like this man."⁵ This was written of Him because of the confident authority with which He made His affirmations. Take, for example, His ethical teachings. He had no system of ethics. Any system adapted to the needs of His day would have become antiquated in the course of a century or two. But will a day ever come when what Jesus said regarding purity of heart and motive, regarding love as the great commandment, regarding generosity, service and self sacrifice shall have been left behind in the moral advance of the human race? In Him the permanent

³Forster, J. B.: *The Finality of the Christian Religion*, p. 518.

⁴Mark 8: 27 and 29.

⁵John 7: 46.

and the unchanging soul of moral action lies before us in absolute purity and in its indissoluble connection with religion.

Not only in respect to the authority, validity and permanence of what He said, but also, and specially in respect to the life He lived Jesus Christ was incomparably great. No more comprehensive account of Him was ever offered than the simple words of the New Testament: ". . . who went about doing good."⁶ No one ever possessed in such proportion and balance, the qualities of gentleness, humility, majesty and might.

If Jesus Christ be a man
And only a man, I say
That of all mankind, I will cleave to Him
And to Him will I cleave away.⁷

His words and His life reveal men to themselves. He awakens people to the great possibilities that are slumbering within them and the great heights which they may reach, though He makes them feel at the same time that His love is beyond their reach. He stirs the deepest and the best within people. It is Jesus Christ, more than anyone else, who makes people feel the grandeur of the moral and spiritual heights to which God is calling them, and it is He who makes them realize how miserably they have failed to respond to the call and the hope of God. It must be asserted that Jesus Christ was not only greater than others but also that He was unique among and different from all others. This is substantiated by many features of His life:

(a) He possessed a moral worth which can only be described by one word, "Sinlessness." He made this claim for Himself without a shadow of hesitation: "Which of you can convict me of sin?" "I always do what pleases Him."⁸ His friends and even His enemies supported Him in this claim. Once His enemies charged Him with being unduly familiar with sinners

⁶*Acts* 10:38.

⁷R. W. Gilder.

⁸*John* 8:41; 5:9.

and laying the charge they bore real testimony to their conviction that He was sinless and holy. His negative witness on this point was even more impressive than His more positive witness. There is not a word in the records that Jesus ever felt guilty of wrong or felt the need of confessing sin. We usually hold that the greatest sin of all is to be unconscious of sin. St. Paul called himself the chief of sinners, but Jesus was never in the mood out of which such expression might come. It is true that he once said "Why callest thou me good?", but it is clear that this came not as the outward expression of conscious wrong or guilt, but rather as a word of caution to an inquirer that he should know the meaning of goodness before applying it to anyone as a compliment.⁹

(b) That He was different from all others is further proved by His attitude towards sinful man. He not only claimed to be sinless, but He also claimed to be the Saviour of sinners. To save sinners was His business in the world. No one ever spoke such stern words against evil as Jesus did. His denunciations of evil burn like sacrificial fire. Sin was horrible to Him and His soul recoiled from it. No sacrifice was too great to avoid sin. "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out. . . . If thine arm offend thee, cut it off."¹⁰ Yet this same Jesus, so inflexibly severe on sin, regarded the sinner with boundless pity. He refused to despair of the very worst and opened for him a door into the Kingdom of God. He claimed the right and the power to forgive people their sins and to bestow a new life upon them. No greater claim could be made and no greater proof could be offered to support the view that He was distinct and different. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."¹¹ It was this union of moral severity, tender pity and unquenchable hope that gave His attitude towards sinners its distinctive character.

⁹Bruce, A. B.: *Apologetics*, p. 340.

¹⁰*Matthew 5: 29 and 30.*

¹¹*Matthew 11: 28.*

(c) He was distinct and different not only in the claim to forgive, but also in the demands which He made upon the loyalty of people. He invaded the most intimate and sacred relationships of life and said they might have to be severed and sacrificed in following Him. No other allegiance could have precedence over allegiance to Him. (See Matt. 10: 37). In this claim to be sinless, in the claim to have the power to forgive sin, and in making tremendous demands upon the loyalties and consciences of people, He was either true or false. If true, He was one with God, if false, He was the worst of men, a deceiver and deceived, not to be regarded as wise or safe for society; as the Fathers of the early Church expressed it: "Aut Deus aut non bonus homo."

(d) Another and a final proof of His singleness of character, and the explanation of all His claims, was His claim that He stood in a unique and different relationship with God the Father. This was a claim, not often made by Him, but He did say: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him."¹² This says that Jesus was related to God as no other man ever was. It was natural that this truth should come home to people only as they became intimate with Jesus. Only the pure in heart could see Jesus in this light. The more acquainted people became with Jesus, the more they felt that it was God Himself who was approaching them, and the later expressions we read in the Fourth Gospel were the natural fruit of the longer acquaintance with His life and power. One proof of the uniqueness of His relationship with God was the constancy of His consciousness of God. His feelings for God were not subject to the vicissitudes, the waxing and the waning which we find even in the greatest religious heroes. They were constant and unchanging elements in His inner life, untroubled by doubt and undimmed by time.

¹²Matthew 11: 27 and Luke 10: 22.

His attitude towards God, from first to last, was one of perfect obedience, perfect submission, and what is more wonderful, when one comes to think of it, perfect trust. In the darkness of Gethsemane, He could still look up to God and say: "Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."¹³ This constant consciousness of God and this unchanging and unfailing trust and confidence in God could belong only to one whose relationship with God was different from that realized by any other man. Let those believe this who can, for the writer we are here face to face with a feature in the life of Jesus never equalled in any other life and beyond which no advance can possibly be made.

Summing up this account of the revelation value of His life, it may be said that in Jesus of Nazareth, as He is known to us in the New Testament and through the long witness of the Church, God has revealed Himself as Holiness and Mercy and Redeeming Love. Through what Jesus was and did, the Christian hears the voice and feels the touch of God; he knows no Jesus and nothing of Jesus except as the medium of God. Jesus is the supreme fact in all the world in which God comes to reveal Himself and to awaken faith. In Him man is in contact with a faith mighty enough to trample down every doubt, with a love that no ingratitude can quench and with a hope that no disaster can cloud. In His personality there resides a spiritual might which the centuries have done nothing to weaken. In touch with Him the invisible world becomes a reality. When He speaks man knows that it is God who is speaking to him. Jesus Christ is not merely one fact among many, in Him man recognizes the one great reconciling fact ordained by God to awaken mankind to faith, love and obedience, and to establish His Kingdom. In Him people meet God seeking them, before they have turned their thoughts to Him. In Him people meet with God who in His great love has made their salvation His own problem and endeavour.

¹³*Matthew 26: 39.*

13

Revelation in the Cross and Resurrection

ACCORDING TO THE NEW TESTAMENT the significance of Jesus' life, which was considered in the last chapter, is best seen in the fact in which the life most fully expressed itself, namely, the death on Calvary's Cross. What, it must be asked, was the revelation made through such a death?

From the standpoint of mere secular history the death of Jesus was a judicial execution. The Jews desired to put Him to death because, in their judgment, He blasphemed by claiming to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. This claim could have no meaning for the Roman government, and so, before giving its consent to His death, the charge against Him had to be changed into one of treason. The charge was written over the cross: "The King of the Jews." In other words, the Roman government was ready to be convinced that He was a dangerous enemy of the State, a revolutionary for whom death was the only punishment.

The New Testament writers speak of His death in a tone and spirit very different from this. For them, the death of Jesus was, in reality, not so much imposed as chosen. "No man taketh it from me but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."¹ In other words His own representation was that if He had chosen to avoid the cross He could have done so. But He felt that there was a necessity, not of an external nature but of an inner nature, about His death. He felt himself led steadily on towards the cross. It was not without a struggle that He faced the cross, but He had such confidence in God that He was willing to face it believing that God's ways, however inscrutable, would result in good.

The inner compulsion appears to have been with Him from very early in His ministry. "And He began to teach them, that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."² "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am straitened till it be accomplished."³ The explanation of this compulsion can only be, for one thing, His love for man which was greater than words can describe. He loved man, not in any external way, but in a way by which He identified Himself with man and entered into man's lot and condition so that He became involved in difficulties which threatened death. He realized that man was a creature of many needs. He not only sympathized with man in his physical and spiritual needs, but He so identified Himself with man that He actually felt those needs.

Back of this compulsion stood, not only His love for man, but also a desire to obey the Father and carry out the Father's purposes. Jesus believed that His presence in the world was the outcome of a Divine plan. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him

¹*John 10: 18.*

²*Mark 8: 31.*

³*Luke 12: 50.*

should not perish, but have everlasting life.”⁴ “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work.”⁵ This identification of Himself with man, and this identification of Himself with God as Son in the condemnation of sin involved Him in persecution and finally in death. If He had thought only of Himself, and if He had turned a deaf ear to what He believed to be a Divine purpose in His life, He could have escaped death. But refusing to compromise with evil, and refusing to qualify His testimony against evil He had to face death.

So far, however, nothing has been said to distinguish His death from that of any other martyr. Dying as a champion of man in his needs and dying because of His unswerving loyalty to the truth and His uncompromising attitude towards evil, He is not different from other noble martyrs. Socrates and Stephen died martyr-deaths because of noble sympathy and unfailing loyalty. The New Testament attaches more meaning than that of martyrdom to the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, according to the New Testament, died not alone because of His love for man, His obedience to God and His unfailing devotion to the truth and his undying hatred of evil, but also and mainly because He believed that His death would be instrumental in separating people from their sins. He did not think, as Roman Catholics believe, that His death would make it possible for God to forgive. He believed that there would be redeeming virtue about the cross. He attached vicarious significance to His death. Sin had caused separation; that separation Jesus believed He could remedy as man himself could not. In other words, the death of Jesus is the supreme evidence of God’s inexhaustible love for His children, and not merely the fact that made it possible for God to forgive, as if God or anything in God ever stood in the way of man’s forgiveness. Just as a father is not turned away from his love by the waywardness of a prodigal son, but is made more anxious by it and uses the opposition of the son as an opportunity

⁴John 3: 16.

⁵John 4: 34.

for showing the forgiving conquering power of love, so Jesus was not turned from His love for man by the opposition and the suffering which that opposition brought to Him, but was made all the more loving and all the more eager to save.

The love of Jesus Christ would have fallen short of the highest love which is in God without this highest proof which the cross provides. His amazing love for man all the days of His life, while it made the cross a logical necessity, was in reality, only perfected in the cross. And not only so, it was also the perfect revelation of the Father's love for His sinful children. The cross, in other words, was the seal of God's hatred of sin and of God's love for sinners. Such love for man, such confidence in God's purposes, and such desire to rescue man from sin which we find all gathered into one focus in the cross, makes Jesus Christ the Author, the Pioneer and the surety of our faith. The cross makes it impossible to doubt that it is the love of God which we meet in Him. The cross thus becomes a great focus of the Christian revelation. It is the fact in the life of Jesus in which His spirit and power come to expression as in no other single act or combination of acts. In the cross Christianity is in a wonderful way summed up. For all these reasons the cross has rightly become the symbol of Christian faith and the emblem of its power. From the cross there streams the might of love, patience, sacrifice, confidence and service, and what are these but the powers that are redeeming man, separating him from his sins, and manifesting upon earth the purpose, the will and the life of God the Father?

But if the cross were the end, man would never have found in it the supreme revelation of the love and self-sacrificing life of God. If the cross were the end, it is certain that He could not be regarded as the complete and final revelation of God. "If we measure what seemed to be the hopeless ignominy of the catastrophe by which His work was ended, and the Divine prerogatives which are claimed for Him, not in spite of but in consequence of that suffering and shame, we shall feel the utter

hopelessness of reconciling the fact, and the triumphant deduction from it, without some intervening fact as certain as Christ's passion, and glorious enough to transfigure its sorrow."⁶ It was the resurrection supervening on the cross that convinced man that in that seeming tragedy God's love to man was finally revealed.

The precise nature of the resurrection is not specially under review here, but the fact of the resurrection, which is indisputable, is the matter of great moment for us now. The fact of the resurrection is proved sufficiently for us by the transformation in the mood and spirit of the disciples who were cast into despair and despondency by the cross. "The great experience which had changed hesitating and half-despairing followers of Jesus into His unfaltering ambassadors was to them the fulfilment of the ancient prophecy that God would pour out His spirit upon all flesh. . . . The Resurrection of Jesus thus brought to an end all their doubts."⁷ Griffith E. Jones⁸ has the following important statement to make: "Whatever be our view of the nature of that event (Resurrection) whether that it involved the resuscitation of the earthly body of Jesus and its transmutation into a spiritual objective reappearance or even that it was a series of subjective visions—there can be no manner of doubt of its effect on the mind of the primitive church. In every sense this mystery was the creative germ of historical Christianity. It threw a backward and illuminating light on the whole teaching and work of Jesus; it glorified His cross of shame and turned it into the symbol of a Divine and sacrificial love; it instantly invested the person of Jesus with Divine significance; and it completely altered the vision of the future for devout believers, whether in this life or in the life to come."

Not only His death, but His resurrection from the dead is essential to our faith in Him as the supreme revelation of God. It

⁶Westcott, B. F.: *The Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 111.

⁷Cave, Sydney: *What Shall We Say of Christ?* p. 44.

⁸*Faith and Immortality*, pp. 165-166.

is not our faith in Him that enables us to believe that death could not hold Him. His resurrection is itself a vital part of the foundation upon which our faith in Him rests. His resurrection is not external to His revelation of God but an integral part of it. "The joyous spirit of His followers, so downcast before, shows that in some sense they took the Resurrection to mean that all power was given to their Lord in Heaven and in Earth, but it was because His method had been vindicated and not because it had been changed. To Peter it meant that He was a man approved of God, His method, which seemed to be defeat, being shown to be God's way of victory. To Paul it declares Him to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, the Spirit He manifested in meekness and lowliness. For both the resurrection merely made plain the meaning of the Life and Death of Jesus, that the moral order of love is the will of God, the last, the Divinest victory over evil, the natural, the all-prevailing, the irresistible dominion, such as is given to no over-riding might; and it called them to like service in the assurance of like victory, not because God had substituted power for love, but because He had shown them that love in the end alone is power, and its fellowship the one perfect bond at once of liberty and order."⁹

There is no doubt that the Resurrection is not a consequence of faith, but belongs to the basis of faith.¹⁰ Exclude the resurrection from the foundation of faith and we have no full idea of the revelation of God, nor, as a consequence, of the foundation of Christian faith. If the life of Jesus Christ ended with His death, doubtless His love proved by His death would be regarded as a revelation of the greatest love that could be found and which might be called "Divine." However, when it is affirmed that the love of God is revealed in Jesus, something more and different is meant, namely, that in Jesus the love of God is revealed in the highest reality, as the ground and goal of the universe. And this is not the case unless it manifests itself as victorious over death.

⁹Oman: *Grace and Personality*, p. 268.

¹⁰Haering, T.: *The Christian Faith*, Vol. 1, p. 211.

Without this goal of the resurrection it is doubtless true that Jesus would remain an outstanding example and guide but it is also certain that the impression of the active God in Him, the revelation of God, would slowly but surely disappear. The significance of the resurrection in the revelation of God is that it is the proof in action of the Mighty Power of the Love at the heart of the universe able to make all things to work together for good, for the accomplishment of His saving purposes. Without the resurrection, Christianity would quickly have come to be regarded as a stage on the long road that humanity is travelling and that as Christianity had superseded other religions, so would it, in time, be superseded and left behind. Without the resurrection, the figure of Jesus would long before this have become a dim half intelligible figure and people would have turned from Him to look elsewhere for religious guidance and religious quickening.

It is scarcely necessary to say that this is the New Testament view of the resurrection. Without the resurrection there would have been no New Testament and no Christian Gospel and no Christian Church. The Book of the Acts thinks of the Risen Lord as active in His Church by His Spirit and the new consciousness of power, in which the disciples rejoice, is recognized as His gift. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear."¹¹ With Paul and John the *present* significance of the resurrection is the important thing. They look for a consummation, but that life will not differ from the new life which the Christian possesses now.¹² The Christian does not find it necessary to wait for another life to enjoy communion with his Master. He is in daily communion with Him and his life is a life in Christ.¹³

Jesus was a teacher who taught great and vital truths. His

¹¹Acts 2: 33.

¹²Chapter 10.

¹³Philemon 1: 21.

life and person had made a profound impression and had convinced those about Him that He was the promised Messiah of God, but the fact remains that this conviction did not withstand the shock of the cross. It was crushed by Calvary. He had often spoken to them about His death, but they could never listen to the suggestion. Such warnings always fell upon deaf ears. For them, the death seemed to contradict all His claims, and when it came it destroyed their faith in His Messiahship which had been created by His teaching and the impressions of His life and work. Suffering and death were the last things the Jew associated with the Messiah, least of all, the shameful death of the cross. For the disciples the cross meant that God had disowned Him and disproved His Messianic claims. It was the resurrection that revived and reinterpreted the faith that had been crushed. It was the resurrection that re-established the Messiahship of Jesus. For St. Paul the resurrection was the fact that proved a Divine Sonship which had been His from the first. For the disciples the resurrection was what finally proved Him the Christ. It changed the death from a tragedy into a divinely significant event. It was the resurrection which proved that the crucified was the One they had supposed Him to be—God's appointed Saviour. It was in the faith and confidence created by it that His followers went out to preach and to build a church. For them, the resurrection was God's answer to the world's attempt to destroy His Son by death.¹⁴

But the resurrection was more than external proof of the claims that He made for His life and work. It was a constitutive part of the revelation of God's redeeming love. It was integral to His Divine saving work.¹⁵ It was what enabled Jesus to make effective the redemptive power of His life and death. Jesus believed that His death would be instrumental in separating people from their sins, but it could never do that apart from Christ as a living active power in the present, to which we unite ourselves by

¹⁴Brown, W. A.: *The Christian Hope*, p. 97.

¹⁵Shaw, J. M.: *The Christian of the Fatherhood of God*, p. 140 ff.

faith. For St. Paul and for all Christians, the risen, glorified, and exalted Christ is the explanation of the whole new life of the Christian. The risen Lord is the life-giving principle of a new humanity. This is what St. Paul meant by the famous words, "in Christ." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."¹⁶ His death is not able to save apart from His living presence and work. "In a word the resurrection of Jesus was for the Apostolic mind the one fact in which the world and history arrived at unity, consistence, coherence; it was the pledge and guarantee of the gathering up in Christ of all things in heaven and in earth. It was the breaking in upon human life of a new world of triumph and hope, in which were contained at once the earnest and ground of the consummation of God's redemptive purpose for the world."¹⁷

¹⁶2 Corinthians 5: 17.

¹⁷Shaw, J. M.: *The Christian Doctrine of the Fatherhood of God*, p. 162.

14

Karl Barth Defines Revelation

THE INTEREST IN THE THINK-
ing of Karl Barth would justify a much longer chapter on the above subject than this will be. This book has dealt with the two great alternative views of Divine revelation. The Roman Catholic and the Protestant and an outstanding champion on each side was called up to testify. The Roman Catholic conception of Divine revelation is unchanged by J. Maritain and the other interpreters to whom references have been made. The Thomist view of Divine revelation still stands for The Roman Church, namely, that it is supernatural information, supernaturally communicated, and that this deposit of information is in the custody of the Church and that she is the authority to determine what is from God and what is not, and also the authority to interpret the information dropped from the sky for the faithful who by an act of intellectual submission, which for them means faith, accept this information on the authority of the Church. The Protestant view of Divine revelation was first propounded by Martin Luther to whom the world owes so much. He affirmed that Divine revelation was not information but fact,

that Divine revelation is not intellectual in character but practical or factual in character and that it aimed to establish a fellowship between God and man that would result in man's salvation. Unfortunately Martin Luther fell away from this vital position, and came to identify revelation and doctrine as the Roman Church had always done. He came to think that the function of the Protestant Church was to retain and protect the correct doctrines which had been given, as the Roman Church had declared. This falling away from his original stand brought serious results from which Protestantism has not yet fully recovered. These have been examined and need not be reviewed here.

As Protestants we owe more than we shall ever know to Schleiermacher and Ritschl who recaptured and rediscovered the vital conception of Divine revelation which Luther had stated and later lost. It may be that Schleiermacher and Ritschl laid too much emphasis upon "feeling" in the one case and upon Jesus Christ as the one fact of Divine revelation in the other, but we must not allow our criticisms of their mistakes, if they were mistakes, to blind us to the tremendous contributions which they made. They both banished the idea of Divine revelation as supernaturally communicated information and once more called Protestants back to the idea of Divine revelation as factual and practical in character. It is God Himself who comes to us in revelation and not information from God and concerning God. Schleiermacher felt that God was around him on every hand and religion to be genuine would need to be personal experience of that real God who meets us in life. Ritschl put his whole emphasis upon facts in which God meets with people, and he may have gone to the extreme in claiming that Jesus Christ was the only fact that possessed real revelation value. It seems to the present writer that John Oman brought to a focus or into a unity the Protestant views of Divine revelation, and whether this book has succeeded in giving the views of Oman adequately or not, it is hoped that it may have done so sufficiently to make the reader turn to all of Oman's works to master them, for no Protestant

who desires to know Protestantism can afford to be without every work that the great mind of John Oman produced.

The difficulty with Protestantism all through its history has been the tendency to go off at tangents and emphasize features out of all proportion to their worth. This cannot be said of John Oman, in the opinion of this writer. But Barth, with all we owe to him as a great Protestant, is no exception to this, and he too goes off at tangents that are apt to make us forget the great worth of his thinking in general. He wants people to be breathlessly anxious concerning the matter of knowing God. He does not want people to be too sure that they know Him. This is a tangent to which he was led by his eagerness to preserve untouched God's initiative in making Himself known. No real Protestant denies the Divine initiative. The subjectivism which Barth would lay at the door of Schleiermacher and some of us would trace to modern New Psychology, has been banished. But surely our fear of that subjectivism should not keep us wondering all the time whether we really know God or not. Surely that attitude of uncertainty concerning our knowledge of God is not a healthy one. We do not find this attitude in the New Testament, as William Adams Brown points out in his fine work *How To Think Of Christ*. Dr. Brown says that Barth is "always warning us against the danger of certainty in religion. What we know about God, he tells us, we hold by a precarious tenure. For God, he keeps reiterating, is the Wholly Other; and there is no test known to our reason by which we can tell whether at any time our thought of Him is true." There are passages in the New Testament, as Dr. Brown points out, to which "these words of Barth do scant justice,"¹ and, in proof, Dr. Brown quotes the well known words of St. Paul: "For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ

¹*How to Think of Christ*, p. 287.

Jesus our Lord.” Dr. Brown appreciates the service which Barth has rendered, but he adds: “Of one thing we may be sure, that if God be really such a one as Jesus would have us believe Him to be, it cannot be His will to leave His children in a state of perpetual anxiety.”² New Testament writers were not in any breathless anxiety about whether they knew God or not. They were sure, steadfast and strong in their confidence that God had made Himself known to them not only in Christ but in many lesser facts. It is the same anxiety to preserve the truth of the Divine initiative that makes Barth go to the extreme of denying revelation-value to nature, man, history and experience. He thinks that in these media it is man who makes the discovery of God and he has no confidence in what the mind of man can do in this matter. In the Incarnation and in The Resurrection, he thinks, it is God who is speaking directly and that is why they are acceptable to him as revelation. No one denies that God manifests Himself in The Incarnation and The Resurrection but surely Barth is astray in denying revelation-worth to everything but these two. In nature, man, history and experience it is God who makes Himself known just as it is God who makes Himself known in The Incarnation and in the Resurrection. It is not a case of us delving into nature and working our way to knowledge of God. It is a case of God in nature speaking to us, manifesting Himself to us, not as clearly as in Christ, but still clearly and convincingly.

Let us now examine more closely some of Barth's works. While we regard Jesus Christ as the supreme revelation and while we are confident that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, this does not mean that exclusive significance is attached to the revelation of God made in Him. This however, is the position of Karl Barth, as the above general statement indicates.³ Barth strongly reacts against the whole modern historical psychological movement which makes religious experience the

²*How to Think of Christ*, p. 287.

³Barth, Karl: *Der Romerbrief*, pp. 66-81.

starting point of theology, seeking to pass from the human side to the Divine, from the subjective to the objective. He declares that it is impossible to do this, for, between God and man is a gap, a discontinuity, caused by sin, which can never be bridged by efforts from the human side. In the preface to the Fourth Edition of his Commentary on Romans he acknowledges his indebtedness to Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian of the last century. He writes: "If I have a system, it consists in this that I always keep in mind what Kierkegaard described as the infinite qualitative difference between time and eternity, between God and man."⁴

This subjectivism Barth traces to Schleiermacher who originated it and Ritschl who perpetuated it in theology. He charges that modern liberal theology has attempted this impossible task of passing from the human to the Divine, and Brunner, the chief theologian of the Barthian movement, believes that there is a modern worship of optimistic evolution. He suggests that from distant Rousseau, modern theologians have borrowed the Stoic thought "man is good," believing that from that beginning it is possible to bridge the gap from man to God. "Liberalism has affirmed that the heart of man is not evil. . . . The modern man will not be told that he is a sinner. He has appropriated to himself Rousseau's words, the Stoic idea, "man is good." Therefore, he believes in an unbroken development till the summit of goodness is reached. He worships before optimistic evolutionism".⁵ This, for him, would make man and not God central, resulting in an anthropocentric instead of theocentric theology which is the Protestant Reformation standpoint, long obscured, in his opinion, by this modern anthropocentric tendency. If this discontinuity is to be healed, if God and man are ever to meet, it will not be through development from man's side, it will not be by man reaching God, it can only be by God coming to man, that is, by Revelation which according to this movement confronts man

⁴*Der Romerbrief*, Preface.

⁵Brunner, E.: *Theology of Crisis*, p. 16.

in two moments of what Barth calls Revelation-history, namely the Incarnation and the Resurrection. "The kernel of the message of Barth is that salvation comes not from, but into history, not from, but into human reality, which in itself cannot produce but only long for it."⁶

Here then is the justification for the affirmation that Barth attaches exclusive significance to Jesus Christ: The revelation of God is in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. This reminds one of Ritschl. Until The Incarnation and particularly until The Resurrection, God was altogether unknown and unknowable, the "Altogether-other." He attaches no revelation value to nature, history and man's conscience. The world was created by God, Barth acknowledges, and, therefore, one might expect to find traces of His revelation there, but according to Barth, the tracks of God in the world have become "the tracks of the Unknown." Brunner disagrees at this point with Barth, feeling that if God has given a special revelation of Himself in Christ there cannot be such a dualism between nature and history and God as Barth finds, and there must have been a prior and general revelation in nature, history and man's conscience.

This view of Barth's is extreme and onesided. It is no dishonour to Jesus to believe in a general as well as a special revelation of which He is the culmination. Nor is it any dishonour of Him not to isolate Him in history and to say that there was faith in God in the world before Jesus came and that there is faith today where His name is not known. To think in this way is not to deny that Jesus is the supreme and final revelation of God—final because one cannot conceive of God being more than Jesus reveals Him to be, or doing more than He has done and is still doing in Jesus Christ. But Barth goes further than attaching exclusive significance to Jesus Christ. He attaches the revelation significance, not to the Jesus of history, but only to the Christ of faith, the Christ of the resurrection. Only in this Christ of faith, and

⁶Brunner, E.: *The Word and the World*.

not in the historical figure with whom alone, as he thinks, historians and liberal theologians deal, is God known. For Barth the resurrection is the revelation of the other world—the other world breaking into this world, Eternity breaking into the time order, the vertical miracle striking the horizontal plane of history. On such a representation little or no revelation-value is attached to the historical figure of Jesus. Indeed, Karl Barth tends to banish the historical figure as being nothing but a conspicuous failure. The historical figure is in absolute contrast to the idea of a glorious Son of God.⁷ The Jesus of the records was for Barth an absurd and ridiculous wandering preacher. It is for him not the historic data about the man Jesus that shakes the world, but Paul's classic summing up of the tradition in the gospel of the Crucified and Risen Lord, "Wherefore, henceforth know we no man after the flesh: Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more." While Paul and the author of the Fourth Gospel were influenced by the Logos doctrine of Philonic thought, as has been pointed out, yet it is also true that they never lost sight of the historical figure as Barth appears to do. This is another very extreme and onesided feature of Barthianism.

We have already acknowledged the great value of Barth's correction of a psychology in our age which puts emphasis predominantly on the human side of religion, suggesting that religion is something which moves from man to God, rather than first from God to man; so much so that the very belief in God as a Power outside and above ourselves is sometimes represented as the product of our own human desires, the projection of our own "wish-thinking." Barthianism is also a valuable corrective of the humanistic self-confident spirit of this age which hopes for the salvation of the world through evolution and scientific progress, though by now such a view must be pretty well shattered. But even in this Barth is onesided and extreme. He creates an

⁷Barth: *Der Römerbrief*, pp. 262-264.

unjustifiable dualism between revelation and religion, that is, he speaks of religious experience as belonging altogether to the subjective human side over against the Divine. The truth is not expressed by saying either revelation or religious experience. A place must somehow be found in our thinking for the objective point of view of Barth and the subjective point of view of Schleiermacher and Ritschl and their followers. We recognize that it is God as revealed and not God as argued to through human experience with whom we have primarily to do in Christian religion and theology. But though God's revelation is thus primary, this revelation can be known only as it is experienced.

There is also, according to this movement, a dualism between the natural and the Supernatural, resulting in God being unknown and unknowable until Jesus Christ; there is a dualism between the historical figure of Jesus and the Christ of faith, the Christ of the resurrection; there is a dualism between experience and religion. All of these we deny, particularly as they have to do with the revelation significance of the Life, the Death and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is no denial of the supreme character of Christ's revelation to say that there was and is a general revelation. It is no dishonour of Jesus to believe that there was faith in the world before He came and that there is faith today where His name is not known. Finally, we do not for a moment believe that the historical figure of Jesus was a failure, but on the contrary, as we have pointed out, a conspicuous triumph. "It is the moral grandeur of Jesus, the stainless purity of His soul, the tenderness of His pity, the largeness of His generosity, love and self-sacrifice, the might of His faith, that have operated as a redemptive force of incalculable magnitude and given to our thought of God a new content."⁸ The death of Jesus Christ was not the awe-inspiring negation or extermination of the human that Barth tries to make out,⁹ but the love of God revealing itself in its supremest and in its most significant self-sacrificing

⁸Morgan, W.: *The Nature and Right of Religion*, p. 104.

⁹Barth: *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, pp. 77 and 79.

form on man's behalf. The resurrection is for us not the first or only point at which God steps into the redemptive process, as it appears to be for Karl Barth, but the culminating evidence of God's love as Eternal and All powerful.

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